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OR,
The Wrecker Witch of
Death Island.

A Romance of the Gulf of Mexico and its Shores,
a Century Ago, and a Companion Story
to "Ocean Guerrillas."

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MONTE-
ZUMA, THE MERCILESS," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.
THE DEATH CRAFT.

"SAIL ho!"

Loud rung the voice at the lookout, in the foretop of a small schooner, that was flying along over the starlit waters of the Gulf of Mexico, at a time, long years ago, good readers, when buccaneers and ocean outlaws of all kinds, from lagoon pirates and coast smugglers, to the daring rovers of the deep blue sea, sailed far and wide to kill or destroy for the gold they could gain.

"IT IS THE DEATH CRAFT, AND WE ARE DOOMED!"

The Giant Buccaneer.

The night was bright starlight, and a six-knot breeze was blowing, causing a gentle swell and some white caps, as the little vessel sailed merrily along, a ripple under her sharp bows, a white line of foam in her wake.

She was a nimble-looking craft—had a saucy look about her, and, withal, a dangerous one, for she was of the build known as “long, low, narrow and rakish,” and her sides showed “teeth”—that is guns, three to a broadside, with a pivot Long Tom mounted astern and one on the forecastle, as a bow-chaser.

Her crew wore skull-caps, dark suits, and belts of arms, while about the masts were stacked muskets, boarding-pikes and cutlasses.

Her sails were white as snow, carried a single reef, and she had but mainsail, foresail and jib set, and was bowling merrily along, making good speed.

One man stood at the wheel, and readily managed her course, while near him stood three others, whose dress and appearance, even in the darkness of night, proclaimed them to be officers.

Had not the rakish appearance and large crew given the craft a suspicious look to the seaman who might meet her, there hung at her peak, although it was night, a *huge black flag*.

The breeze so floated this sable ensign that now and then it would spread out in such a way as to have the bright light beaming from the companionway fall directly upon it, and then it would be revealed in all its hideousness, black as jet, and ornamented with a skeleton form holding in one bony hand a flaming red sword, and in the other a golden anchor.

It was a strange device, and told plainly that the master of that craft, whoever he might be, had a golden anchor as his hope of winning gold by a reddened sword, or Death.

When the cry from the foretop announced a sail in sight, one of the officers upon the quarter-deck coolly took a cigar from between his lips, and called out:

“Whereaway, my man?”

“Dead ahead, sir.”

“Ay, ay! Can you make her out yet?”

“She is a small craft, sir, and only a short distance off,” answered the lookout.

“What do you call a small craft?” impatiently cried the officer.

Thus urged, the lookout replied:

“She is a small boat, sir, perhaps a ton in measurement, and carries a leg-of-mutton sail.”

“I see her now, and we are but a few cable-lengths away.

“You should have discovered that craft sooner lookout.”

“She seemed to come in sight very suddenly, sir, and—Great God, sir! see therè!”

The wild cry of the lookout was followed by a shriek, and losing his hold from fright, he fell headlong to the deck, striking with a crunching sound that sickened those who heard it.

And from those on the schooner came an echo of the lookout’s cry, while the captain of the outlaw craft shouted in tones that thrilled his crew with horror:

“God above! it is the Death Craft, and we are doomed!”

A moan burst from the crew at the words of their leader, and many hid their eyes with their hands to shut out the fearful sight, while others, with chattering teeth and trembling hands sprung to their posts to obey the stern command, delivered in a quivering voice:

“Hard! hard down your helm! About ship and let fly everything!”

“Now, shake those reefs out, you devils, and set every rag she’ll bear, for we must drop yonder craft out of sight!”

The voice of their leader aroused the men to busy action, and the graceful schooner went about as though on a pivot, and instantly she darted away in flight, leaving the strange craft that had so struck terror to the hearts of her crew, calmly sailing in her wake.

And such a strange, weird craft, for it was in the shape of a coffin.

It carried a single mast, upon the top of which burned a bluish light, casting a circle of ghastly glare about it as it glided along over the water.

The sail was what is known as a leg-of-mutton, was blood-red, and had upon it a white skull and cross-bones, while the one person visible upon its deck, was, to all appearance, a skeleton, one bony hand resting upon the tiller, the other holding the sheet rope.

With such a strange craft and helmsman in sight, no wonder the schooner fled under clouds of canvas, nor that her pirate crew, full of superstition, rendered worse by their crimes, trembled with horror at the fearful doom they felt must overtake them.

CHAPTER II.

LOST UPON THE OCEAN.

THE scene changes to the sunset hour preceding the night upon which the pirate schooner came upon the Death Craft of which there was a strange superstition prevailing among the seamen.

Upon a rugged island among a chain of isles in the Gulf of Mexico, a thrilling scene is being enacted.

A youth, clad in the uniform of a midshipman in the American navy, a hundred years ago, is flying like the very wind across a plateau that forms the center of the island, and coming in full chase of him is a pack of bloodhounds.

The plateau is shut in on three sides by a cliff that faces the waters of the Gulf, and too high to spring from without going to certain death, and too precipitous to scale.

Not a tree breaks the level expanse, only a stump of what the lightning had left of a grand old pine.

Toward this the young sailor was running with the speed of a hunted deer.

In the background stood three persons, one a giant form in stature, clad in white, the second a young man in sailor garb, with a handsome, yet dark and sinister face, and the third a woman, but so tortured out of all semblance by her wild attire, and tattooed face and arms, as to be hardly recognizable as such.

Calmly they stood gazing at the youth flying for his life from the savage bloodhounds, and seeming to anticipate joy in seeing him run down, pulled to earth and torn to pieces by their ravenous jaws.

But the face of the youth, though pale, is serene, and as he runs, he uncoils from beneath his jacket a long rope.

Already in the end a noose is tied, and this he throws around the lightning-shattered trunk, and with a spring is over the edge of the cliff, sliding down with the agility that only a sailor can.

After him, unable to check their speed, one or two of the bloodhounds follow with a crash that shatters their bones, while the rest of the pack stand baying wildly on the edge of the precipice.

But, unheeding now his harmless pursuers, the youth flies along the beach to a small cove where two vessels lie moored.

One of them is a smack, but her sails are not bent and lie bleaching upon the sands.

The other is a craft that a brave heart might hesitate before venturing in, for it is in the shape of a coffin.

It is stanchly built, has the appearance of being a good sailor, yet is the shape of a coffin, blunt bows and stern, and decked over in such a way as to perfectly resemble one, while only a small cockpit is aft.

A single mast is forward, for it is cat-rigged, and the sail is red, with hideous emblems in white upon it.

Upon the top of the short mast is a lantern, though not lighted.

But the youth did not hesitate an instant as to going in that ghastly craft, for he sprung into it, raised the sail, and headed for the inlet, where the surf was running high.

But through the breakers he went in safety, and, as twilight fell upon the waters he was out upon the blue waters of the Gulf, cruising swiftly along.

Glancing back he saw the giant form and his two companions, with the hounds at their heels, hastening to the cove, and beheld them hastily bending the sails upon the smack.

But darkness shut them from view as the smack got ready to run out in chase, and he saw them no more.

“They will not catch me, for now I can change my course,” he muttered, as he stood off at an angle with the course he had been steering.

Glancing about his strange craft he saw with regret that she carried no stores, no water, and that he was afloat in a vessel that might indeed prove his coffin.

A small stick with a pine knot on the end he took to be used for lighting the lamp from the cockpit, and there was a box of matches for striking a light.

Then he found a bundle in the stern locker, and opening it a hideous skull mask was displayed, with a black suit, so painted with white, as to resemble at a distance a skeleton form.

“Why I can frighten a seventy-four gun ship out of the Gulf with this,” he muttered, and then added:

“This is the rig that giant guard of the island had on when he sailed out and picked me up the other night, after the Smuggler Queen had revenged herself by throwing me into the sea.

“Well, it is a queer craft, and a weird rig; but it’s a plank between me and death, and I’ll cling to the old coffin until she goes under, and try to make the nearest port.”

So saying, he trimmed his sail, took his bearings as well as he could, and began to beat toward the nearest haven.

For several hours he went merrily along, in spite of his dismal craft, and then suddenly, as he put away on another tack, beheld a vessel not far distant, and heading straight for him.

Just then the flag at her peak fluttered out full, and the reflection from the lamp in the companionway fell upon it.

“Great Heaven! it is the black flag, and consequently the craft is a pirate.

“I must not be taken, so I will try to see if this ghastly paraphernalia will save me.”

Instantly he drew on him the skeleton suit, incased his head in the skull mask, and then lighted the torch and next the lantern.

The effect upon those on the schooner the

reader already knows, and how she fled in dismay from the Death Craft.

In spite of his situation, the youth laughed heartily at his triumph and said:

“I know I could put a line-of-battle ship to flight; but I’ll have to find a port, for there is not a vessel afloat that would pick me up.”

As he sat there in the full glare of the mast-head light, his face and form were distinctly revealed.

He was perhaps eighteen, and of a sinewy, agile form, broad-shouldered, and with every indication of possessing great strength.

His face was exceedingly handsome, a trifle reckless, maybe, and full of youthful vigor; but it was a strong face, could be stern at times, and his eyes were lustrous and most expressive.

That he was one who could meet any situation with nerve and fearlessness was certain, and even in his then desperate strait he was not in the least alarmed.

After the schooner had been flying in flight for some time, he took up his stick and extinguished his lantern, and threw aside the hideous attire that he had put on.

Thus the night passed away and the day dawned.

But no sail was in sight, no land was visible, and he was alone upon the vast blue waters.

All day long he watched the horizon, thirsty, hungry, tired; but he did not despair.

Again

“Night’s dark wing o’er the sea was thrown,” and the poor youth was desolate, though he did not give up.

Toward midnight some fishing-smacks appeared in sight, and he headed toward them, filled with joy at a speedy rescue.

But suddenly over the waters rung in stentorian tones, from one who had evidently been watching the strange craft through a glass:

“Ho, lads, yonder craft is the one I have seen off Witch’s Island.

“I know her cut, so fly all for your lives!”

Instantly the rattling of blocks, the fluttering of sails, and frightened voices giving orders followed, and away started the little fleet of half a score, scudding off under all sail.

“Ho, the smacks! I am alone and need aid!” shouted the youth, in a voice that rung far over the waters.

But the fleet heeded not, if they heard, and angry with their fears, the youth muttered:

“Fools! I will scare them still more.

“I will leave them no doubt but that this is the Death Craft.”

With this he threw on his skeleton suit and mask and lighted the lantern.

The wild yell of terror that broke from the superstitious seamen at this reached his ears, and then, in spite of his distress, his boyish nature exerted itself, and he broke forth in ringing laughter.

CHAPTER III.

A WRECK IN THE SOUTH SEAS.

FROM the waters of the Gulf of Mexico I must beg my kind reader to accompany me to the South Sea, where, one night of fearful storm, some twenty years previous to the opening of this romance, a stanch brig is driving along almost under bare poles.

Upon her decks a wild scene is transpiring, for her crew, maddened with drink, having broken into the spirit-room, are engaged in mutiny, and dead forms lie here and there, with others in death-agonies, and still more battling savagely with each other for mastery.

As the broiling crowd surge aft, the helmsmen leave the wheel, the brig’s bows fly up into the wind, and rolling, pitching, and washed by the seas, she drives side on, while the mutineers and defenders of the vessel still grapple in the death-struggle, unheeding their danger from the elements.

Suddenly a terrific shock is felt through the length of the ship, and every man stands aghast.

Again it comes, and then too late they all recognize their deadly danger.

A moment more, and with a crash that seems to split her almost apart, the devoted craft is hurled upon the shore a helpless wreck.

Then, amid the howling winds and roaring waves arise the shrieks of the crew, mutineers and those who were true, and foes and friends are borne off together to die in the mad waters.

Thus through the long night of storm the brig rocks upon the surf where she was thrown, no one upon her decks, and her hatches all nailed down, her companionway fastened from without.

With the dawn the storm disappears, the sea runs down, and as the sun rises above the horizon, the blows of an ax are heard.

It is some one cutting through the fastened companionway from within.

Faster and faster, harder and harder resound the blows, and then the sharp edge of the ax cuts through the wood.

But just then wild yells are heard, and clambering over the shattered bulwarks come a

horde of savages, tattooed, disfigured by scars, and in all the splendor of barbarian warriors.

Armed with their rude weapons they cross the deck, howling like demons, and behold the companionway with the hole cut therein.

Then one who appears a leader calls out in broken English:

"Who is there?"

In a man's voice the answer comes:

"There are but three of us, myself, my wife and child, and my vessel was seized by mutineers, and when wrecked they went into the sea."

The savage seemed to get an inkling of the situation, and interpreted it to his wild companions, who gave a grunt of approbation that all had not gone overboard.

Seizing his ax, the man within again resumed his cutting, and soon had a space broken through.

Handing the ax to the savage, he bade him knock off the fastenings, and a moment after the gang rushed into the cabin.

There stood a man of fine physique, with a face that was attractive, and yet hardly sincere.

Behind him was a woman, crouching upon the floor, and in her arms she clasped a boy of five years, as though to shield him from harm.

The woman was young, strangely so for the mother of such a boy; her form was perfectly molded, and her face one of rare beauty, in spite of the white look of terror then resting upon it.

"Kill us altogether," she pleaded, in anxious tones, looking up in the faces of the warriors as they gazed upon the little group.

"No kill, keep for friend," said the English-speaking savage, and again he talked in his own tongue to his comrades, who gave a grunt of assent.

Then the three persons thus found were taken to the island in the canoes of the savages, and found themselves the inmates of a thatched hut, where the man and woman well realized, and with horror, what their lives would be among that wild people.

Stripping the brig of what it held, the savages brought their booty ashore, and to curry favor with their master, the chief, both the man and the woman fitted up his hut as best they could, showed him and the others the uses of many things, and made themselves so useful that they felt that they would at least not be treated with cruelty by their captors.

But what could even kindness be in such captivity, to those who had been nurtured amid comfort and refinement?

Alas! it could be for them but a living death, and that they soon discovered, for to enhance the beauty of the woman in their eyes, her face, arms and neck were tattooed with strange devices in black, blue and red dyes, and the man and the little boy were forced to have pricked into their flesh, over their hearts, emblems which would last through their lives.

Thus, upon the shipwrecked trio fell wretchedness, sorrow and despair.

CHAPTER IV.

OUT OF BONDAGE WORSE THAN DEATH.

SEVERAL years have passed away since the brig was driven a wreck upon that island in the South Seas and the three who survived the storm became the slaves of the savages who dwelt there.

The sun was setting in the cloudless west, while from the east were rising dark clouds that threatened to break in fury upon the sea and land.

Afar off from the shore, more than a league, lay a stately ship becalmed, for not a ripple was upon the waters, not a breath was in the air.

She had lain there for hours, like

"A painted ship
Upon a painted ocean."

her hull, spars, rigging and sails hanging in festoons, revealed in the waters beneath her.

Along the shores, hiding in the brush and among the rocks, scores of savages had watched her, hoping that she, too, would drive helpless upon their island.

In the crevice of the rocks crouched a man also watching her.

He had been there for hours, and his eyes were bent upon the distant vessel.

He was not a native of the island, that was evident; nor a savage, though his face was darkly bronzed, and he wore simply the tunic of feathers about his waist which was the dress of the barbarians, his body, arms and legs being bare.

Upon his left breast was tattooed a sable bird on wing, and in its claws it clutched a snake of crimson.

Otherwise the man was not disfigured by tattooing.

His hair was long and matted, and his face wore an anxious, haggard look.

Suddenly, as the sun went down, he muttered:

"I will try it, for death cannot be worse than what I now suffer."

"If I reach the ship I will tell them that I am the only captive for I cannot take her back with me."

"No, no, I cannot do that, all disfigured as she now is."

"I will let her remain here with her boy, until death relieves them of their misery, while I, with the jewels I have found among these savages, and which they have taken from wrecked vessels, yet value not, will begin life anew."

"But I wish that I had the gems she has, yet, if I went for them, I might be seen to come back here, and with the ship off yonder I would certainly be watched."

"I will go alone, and forget both my wife and child."

So saying he slipped cautiously down to the water's edge, and, as it was now twilight, he was not seen by those still watching the ship.

Entering the water, he swam noiselessly out from the shore, his eyes upon the ship's light.

His long stay among the islanders, who swam like ducks, had made him an expert as a swimmer, and his swift strong strokes sent him rapidly on.

Still the calm rested upon the waters, but the storm was rising, and ere he reached her, the good vessel might dart away.

So he bent every nerve to his work, and drew nearer and nearer the vessel.

Nearer and nearer too drew the storm.

"Oh, God! should I fail to reach her! for I have begun to love life now," he groaned.

But on he pressed, harder and harder, swifter and swifter, and soon was but a hundred yards away.

But just then the first ripple of the breeze, the precursor of the coming storm, reached the vessel, and she began to move.

"Ship ahoy! ship ahoy!" he shrieked.

But on the good craft moved, her masts stripped to meet the storm.

"Ahoy! good ship, ahoy! don't leave me for the love of God!"

"Ahoy! ahoy!"

Wildly his voice rung out over the waters, and the crew heard it, and an answer came:

"Ahoy! who hails, and from where?"

"Here in the sea; I am swimming out to you."

"Ay, ay, we'll luff up and take you on board, my man."

"Cheer up, for rescue is near!" cried a manly voice, and in five minutes more the bold swimmer, but cowardly deserter of his wife and child, was drawn on deck, while the good ship went flying along before the gale, with the power to help those whom he had cruelly left to their fate, yet not one word coming from him to tell those who had rescued him that he had left a wife and child among cruel savages, while he had freed himself of a bondage worse than death.

CHAPTER V.

THE WOMAN WRECKER.

"OH, God, is it to be ever my doom to suffer thus?"

The words broke in a wail from a woman's lips, as she struggled through the wild surf to the shore, a shattered boat, which she had just sprung from, being also dashed upon the sands.

It was in the afternoon, and the sunlight fell upon a woman whose face was marred by peculiar and strange devices tattooed over every particle of skin visible, neck and hands being also disfigured thereby.

She was plainly dressed in a robe, the wet folds of which clung about her, displaying a form of graceful outline.

Her face had once been beautiful, but the tattooing, with the stamp of long years of suffering, had made her stern, and gave her a look of adamantine coldness.

"Safe—yes," she muttered. "I am safe, while those whom I paid well to carry me across to New Orleans have gone to the bottom."

"Superstitious fools! because days of calm came, and then a storm, they plotted to throw me into the sea, calling me a witch, and had I not heard them and sprung into the boat astern and cut it loose, they would have carried out their hellish design."

"And here, after hours of danger, I am cast upon this dreary island."

"Oh, God! what have I not suffered the last fifteen years!"

"For him, whom I so madly loved, to desert me and my child that night, long years ago, and swim off to that gallant vessel, nearly broke my heart."

"I saw him, though others did not; but I believed that he would return and rescue me and our boy."

"But no! With the jewels he had with him, his coward heart made him desert the poor tattooed wife and his child, and yet some day I will find him, and then I will carry out the oath I made that night of my escape from the South Sea Island, where I knew so much of anguish."

"When he left me, as he did, my heart was almost broken; and then, when these savages went to attack a neighboring island and carried my boy with them, and the canoe that he was in was picked up by a trading-vessel, I almost died."

"But the boy did not desert me, I know, for

he told them of his mother in cruel captivity, but the cowards would not come to rescue me."

"Yes, that was it, I know."

"Well, revenge kept me alive long years, and revenge made me swim many miles to board the trading-craft that at last bore me away from cruel bondage."

"Oh, that I could find my boy!"

"Oh, that I could find that man!"

"But my search has been in vain, and in the old home where we lived, none knew me, and all looked in horror upon me, until I have become a wanderer upon God's green earth and blue waters, searching for the one I love, the one I hate."

"And here I am, again cast ashore."

"Oh, Heaven! have you no mercy upon me?"

"Must I ever suffer the anguish that now racks my brain and fills my heart and soul?"

And the poor woman dropped upon her knees in the sand, and raised her clasped hands toward the skies, now tinted with the rosy hues cast by the sinking sun.

For a long time she remained thus, as though in prayer, and then she arose and began to slowly walk over the island.

It was many acres in size, with the land forming a cliff upon three sides, and upon the fourth lowlands.

Pine and scrub-oak trees grew here and there in thickets, vales intersected the interior, and a wall of foam, only here and there broken by an inlet, showed that a reef ran around the island.

Upon one side was a small cove, and extending up from it, a ravine with precipitous sides.

Herein stood a small cabin, once the home of wreckers, evidently, for in it were stores and booty, though no trace of a human being having been there for a long time.

The stale food she eagerly devoured, and then once more continued her tour of inspection.

Upon one point, bolder than the other parts of the island, was a niche cut into the side of the cliff.

Up to this, by steps water-worn and cut in the precipitous sides, she went, and there found an old lantern.

It was so arranged with looking-glasses at different angles, as to at once tell her that it had been a beacon, without a doubt a false one.

Off from the cliff was a ragged reef that must wreck any craft driving upon it, and the shore at her feet was low and shelving, to catch any debris cast upon it.

"Well, I shall not starve here, and if I cannot bring a vessel to my rescue, I shall become merciless, and, with the false beacon, lure them on to their ruin, as many a good craft has come before them."

"Ah! I see bones yonder in plenty, and others in the ravine."

"There has been a carnival of death on this island at some time, and if I have to remain here, then Heaven have mercy on those that have to deal with me, for I am beginning to hate my fellow-beings."

As the sun touched the horizon the desolate, wretched, life-marred woman wended her way back to the ravine.

She found quarters in the hut, and plenty of food, such as it was.

Worn out at last she sought rest, to awake with the rising sun.

Thus days passed, and she could do nothing but watch, wait and hope.

But no gallant ship came near the island to rescue her.

Now and then afar off she caught the glimpse of a sail, and then it would slowly disappear from view.

Darker and darker grew her brow, colder and harder grew her face, and at last she muttered, after long weeks of watching and waiting:

"I am desperate now, and must soon have food."

"As no vessel will come by day, I swear they shall by night."

"Heaven forgive me for what I do, but I am driven to despair."

Hastily she sought the beacon in the cliff.

The glasses were brightened and rearranged, the lanterns cleaned and filled with oil found in the hut, and when darkness came on the beacon sent its baleful glare out over the waters.

But nights passed away and no vessel appeared to trust in the fatal light, and the woman was growing more desperate, for her food would last but a week longer.

Then a season of storms set in, and days and nights of tempest followed, lashing the sea into fury, causing the waves to break with roars like thunder upon the reef, and the island to rock almost under the heavy fall of the waters upon its sands.

Eagerly the woman watched, attending her false beacon by night and sleeping by day.

One night, over the black waters came a flash, and the deep boom of a gun followed.

"It is a vessel, and in distress," fairly shrieked the Woman Wrecker.

Then again came the flash and heavy boom.

"She is driving right upon the reef."

"Ha! she is dismasted," she cried, as another flash showed a wreck driving rapidly upon the reef.

"Now I shall have food, now I shall see men

The Giant Buccaneer.

die, for she is driving to her doom, shrieked the tattooed Woman Wrecker, and she danced in glee about her false beacon, sending forth its deadly light over the tempest-tossed waters.

CHAPTER VI. SELLING ONE'S SOUL.

As the woman, tattooed to disfigurement, imbibed to revenge upon her fellow-beings, and turned wrecker from sheer despair, stood on the cliff by her false beacon, she had the appearance of a very fiend.

She had found some clothing among the booty in the hut that she had made her quarters, and she had robed herself in white, leaving her tattooed neck and arms bare, revealing all the hideous devices thereon.

Her hair was loosened and hung down her back, with locks here and there blown wildly by the wind, and in her hand she held a staff in the shape of a cross.

Standing there in the baleful glare of the deadly light, this Woman Wrecker was enough to strike terror to any heart, while she seemed to have lost all pity, all heart, and fairly reveled in the mad elements and their warring upon the fatal ship.

Boom after boom burst above the roar of the storm, and each flash of the minute gun illuminated the wreck driving toward the reef, and revealed scores of dark forms crowded together upon the deck, gazing anxiously shoreward.

Were they drifting into some safe harbor?

Were they driving to ruin?

Such were the thoughts in the minds of the doomed as they were swept nearer and nearer the shore.

Suddenly a wild wail was heard, following quickly on the boom of the gun so piteously pleading for help.

Their eyes had fallen upon the breakers near, and they knew that no mortal power could save them.

Hither, thither they ran, women shrieking, children wailing and strong men crying aloud in their despair.

All these sounds reached the ears of the Woman Wrecker, as she stood by her false beacon, and she answered them by one long, loud peal of laughter.

She had become demoniacal in her hatred of her kind, and her joy in their sufferings commingled.

The next moment she heard the crash, the rending of timbers, the wails of anguish, and then only the roar of the elements were heard.

Hastening down the water-worn steps to the beach, she stood where the spray fell upon her, watching the foaming, curling waves.

Suddenly her eyes caught sight of a dark object in the midst of the snowy foam, and the next instant it was cast ashore at her feet.

Quickly she seized it and drew it beyond the reach of the waves.

It was a woman, a babe clasped in her arms. Both were dead.

A moment the Woman Wrecker stood gazing upon them in the darkness, and then she sighed; but, wheeling suddenly toward the sea, she saw that here, there, and all along the beach dark forms were being hurled on shore.

Running from one to the other of them, she dragged them beyond the break of the seas, and momentarily bent over each in turn.

"Dead, all dead! And how could it be otherwise?" she muttered.

And thus they came, one at a time, and then two locked in each other's arms, as they had died in their death-struggle with the treacherous waves.

Over a score now lay upon the beach, and, as the waves cast up no more, the woman seemed to decide upon some bold plan.

Wrapping the long folds of her white gown about her, she watched her chance and dashed into the breakers.

One passed over her, then another, but she arose far out from the shore.

In her captivity she had learned to swim like a fish, and the wildest sea was not too rough for her.

Boldly she breasted the waves, and her course lay for the wreck, which had struck bows on upon the reef.

To one of the stumps of a mast hung a lantern, and this was her guide, while behind her flashed her own false beacon.

With powerful stroke she swam on, came up under the lee of the wreck, and seizing some rigging that hung over the bows, drew herself on board.

At the first glance she believed that the wreck was deserted.

It rocked wildly, and was pounding away in a manner that showed it must soon go to pieces.

Then her eyes fell upon a form by the foremast.

The lantern above cast a dim light upon the deck, and she beheld a man lashed to the stump of the mast, yet sitting down.

His head was bowed and he did not see her, and suddenly, in a deep voice, that reached her ears, he cried:

"Great God! can it be that I alone am saved? Can it be that my life, after what I have been guilty of, has been spared."

"But my doom will soon be sealed, for I know that yonder beacon burns on the Haunted Island!"

"Had the captain heeded my warning, he would have given this accursed place a wide berth."

"Better we had gone down in the Gulf than strike here."

"Alas! alas! all are gone, and I must meet a fearful fate, too, I fear."

"Ha! how the old wreck rocks! It will soon go to pieces, and what to do God only knows, and it is His punishment for my crimes."

The man's head again bowed, and he remained in deep silence.

But all he had said the woman had heard, as she crouched in the forecastle, only a few feet from him.

Suddenly she glided forward to where the light of the lantern fell full upon her.

Then the man raised his eyes, and they fell upon the woman.

A shriek broke from his lips, as he saw that strange form in white, the clinging robe, the long waving hair, the tattooed face, neck and arms.

She appeared to him like some ghostly apparition, and he covered his face with his hands to shut out the sight.

Then he looked again, and groaned, for it was no hallucination, for there she stood in the full glare of the lantern.

"Woman, devil, spirit, what and who are you?" gasped the man, in tones that quivered as he spoke.

"I am the Ghost of this Haunted Island," was the response of the strange being.

"Oh, God!" he groaned.

"You need not call upon the Being whose laws you have outraged, crime-stained man, for no power can save you other than the power I hold."

"And will you save me?" he tremblingly pleaded.

"Upon conditions," was the distinctly-uttered response.

"What conditions?

"Speak, woman or ghost, and tell me quick, or I shall go mad!" he cried.

"My conditions are that you become my slave for five years, to do my bidding, whatever it be, day or night, and if you fail me you yield your soul to Satan."

"Speak! Do you agree to my terms if I save your life, and, after your term of service expires, pledge you your freedom?"

"Must I lose my soul if I fail you?" the man asked, in a hoarse whisper.

"Yes, and body and soul you must sell yourself to me for the time I ask."

"Do you accept, or shall I kill you now?"

She moved a step forward, and he fairly groaned forth:

"Spare my life, and I will sell my soul to you for the time you ask."

CHAPTER VII. THE GIANT SLAVE.

"CAN you swim?"

The Woman Wrecker asked the question of the man who had just pledged himself body and soul to her.

"I can swim like a South Sea Islander," was his answer, as he untied the rope with which he had lashed himself to the broken mass.

At his response she started, for vividly did her long captivity among the South Sea Islanders come up before her.

"Come," she said, hoarsely, and she walked toward the bow.

"Where?"

"This old hulk will go to pieces soon, so follow me."

Over the bows she went into the foaming waters, and he followed her.

Both struck out with strong stroke and were borne rapidly shoreward, the man keeping near the woman.

At last they reached the shore, and she pointed to the bodies that strewed the sand.

"Those are your shipmates," she said.

"Yes; are all dead?"

"Yes, all; but should we find one alive that one must die."

"Must die?"

"Yes. Come!"

She led the way along the row of dead, placing her hands on the pulse and heart of each, and drawing out several more bodies that had been washed ashore.

"Ah! this man is not dead; drag him back into the waves," she said.

"But—"

"Slave, obey!" was her stern command, and, wholly under the influence of the woman, he took up the limp form and tossed it into the sea.

Soon it came out again, and once more she said:

"Throw him in again."

He did so, until when it was cast ashore for the third time, the woman remarked coolly:

"Now there is no life in him."

"What ship was that?"

"The Spanish ship Ferdinand."

"Where from?"

"The Indies and bound to Spain; but she was

blown off her course by the storm, dismasted and cast ashore."

"These bodies are those who were her crew and passengers?"

"Yes."

"How many in all had she?"

"Twenty-two in crew, and twelve in the cabin."

"Wealthy Dons, and their families, doubtless?"

"Yes."

"And you?"

"Am an Englishman."

"Your name?"

"Call me English."

"It is as good, doubtless, as the one you fear to make known; but what were you on board?"

"A mate."

"Ah!" and the woman walked on in silence for some time.

Then she turned into the ravine, and reaching the hut said:

"You will find dry clothing and wraps there, and you can make your bed yonder under that shelter."

With this she turned away and sought her own quarters, seemingly oblivious of the misery she had just witnessed, and the dead forms that were dotting the beach.

"With the first blush of dawn she was up and out upon the sands.

But the man she had saved was there before her.

He was a giant in size, even over seven feet tall, dressed in sailor garb, for he still retained his own clothes, and was the Hercules he looked.

His face was handsome, strongly cut, and yet it was one to fear rather than love.

"You are looking at your dead friends?" she interrogated.

"Yes," and he gazed at her curiously.

"Give me the jewels you have taken from them."

He started, looked surprised, and silently handed over many rare and beautiful gems and golden trinkets.

She made no comment upon them, but went on down the line searching several he had not been to.

Then she turned to the giant and said:

"The storm has gone down and the wreck still holds."

"We must get the booty ashore, if there are boats on board."

He told her there were two, and springing into the sea, she started for the wreck, he at once following her.

In the hold was a cage of several large blood hounds, and these the Woman Wrecker gazed on with admiration, and they were carefully taken on shore in the one boat that still remained on the wreck.

Then stores followed in abundance, and all day long the Giant Slave, for such he had become, pulled between the wreck and the shore, the woman bringing the things she wished from the hold.

Thus three days passed, and then a storm swept round and broke up the old hulk, and the giant felt that his doom was sealed, for his superstitious nature held him enthralled to the woman to whom he had bartered his soul, and whom he looked upon as some strange being almost supernatural.

CHAPTER VIII.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

SEVERAL years passed away, after the midnight wreck of the Spanish craft, upon the Haunted Island, and in that time tidings had spread all along the Gulf shores that a dread being, a witch, made the place her home.

It was said that in earlier days buccaneers had buried their treasure there, and in each hole, with the gold and jewels, had thrown a human being in alive, and it was the ghosts of these, rumor had it, that kept guard over the island.

Wreckers had gone thither and attempted to live, but the legend had it that these alleged ghosts, the guards of the hidden treasure, had driven them off in alarm, and it was these huts and booty which the Woman Wrecker had found.

With her a dweller upon the island it became more dreaded than ever by seamen, and all vessels gave it a wide berth, unless some poor, unfortunate craft, driven by storm and losing her bearings, beheld the supposed friendly light and thus dashed on to ruin and death.

Dwelling there with her Giant Slave, and concocting all manner of schemes to alarm the superstitious, the Woman Wrecker became a Witch in appearance, as well as in name.

The bones of those who had been lost there she had whitened and ornamented her cavern with, for she had had the Giant Slave dig a cave in the ravine cliff for her, besides others where she had put unfortunates whom afterward she put to death.

The bloodhounds had increased in number to a good-sized pack, her store-huts were filled with booty and stores, and the strange man she called her slave obeyed her every word and gesture.

Thus the years went by, until one night a stanch vessel came on shore, and among the

crew several reached the land, all to be attacked, excepting one, by the bloodhounds.

That one, a young man, with a dark, handsome face, was captured and thrown into one of the cave-cells, with the savage dogs as his keepers.

That he was to die, the Giant Slave told him, for the woman had become a fiend, and she intended at her convenience that the bloodhounds should run the human quarry down for her sport.

But one night a lugger was sighted standing in close, to the shore and the Giant Slave went out in the coffin craft, which he had built, to frighten the crew off, and quickly did so.

But he found, swimming shoreward, one who had been thrown into the sea by those on the lugger, to avenge the death of one he had slain in the discharge of his duty.

This one was the youth whom the reader beheld flying from the pack of hounds, and who made his escape in the coffin craft.

He, too, had been thrown into a cave-cell to await his doom, but, brought out to meet his fellow-prisoner in mortal combat, for the amusement of the Witch, his bullet in the duel they fought, had buried itself in a crucifix worn by his adversary, and when the wound was searched for a raven on the wing was discovered tattooed over the heart of the young man.

In that young man, thus strangely found, the Witch recognized her own son.

It was her own crucifix which she had hung about his neck long years before, and more, her own hand had tattooed the emblem he bore over his heart.

It was her son, there could be no doubt, and she took him to her heart, and ordered the other prisoner to be the victim in the race with the hounds.

But the fleet-footed boy had held his own and made his escape, and the reader finds him at sea in the Death Craft, first frightening the crew of a pirate schooner half out of their wits, and then putting to flight a fleet of fishing-smack.

Having seen these disappear in the gloom, the brave youth again felt the full loneliness of his situation, not to speak of its danger, should a storm spring up.

He might follow in the wake of the smacks; but were they going to the fishing-grounds, or to port?

Might they not change their course, and then they had already gotten out of sight, and without compass he knew not which way to head, for the skies were overcast, and he had no star to guide him on his way.

To sail in one direction might be to take him away from the land, and, worn out with watching and loss of sleep, he determined to take a rest.

Lying down in the bottom of his boat, and covering himself with the hideous skeleton clothing, he was soon fast asleep, under the gentle rocking of the waves.

The sun's rays, as it peered above the horizon, falling in his face, awoke him, and springing to his feet, he glanced around him.

All was a boundless expanse of restless waters.

Not a sail in sight to greet his vision—yes, far off on the horizon was a tiny spot of white.

Was it a gull's wing?

No, it was a sail, and soon he knew that it was coming toward him.

"Now there is hope for me," he cried, gladly, and he headed his own craft with the wind abeam, to meet the stranger.

Nearer and nearer it came, rising well above the horizon, and displaying the rig of one of the trim plantation luggers often used by the coast planters as yachts as well as freighters.

"Sail ho!" he called out, cheerily, as glancing around the watery expanse, he beheld another sail in sight.

It was a long way off, but watching it, he saw that it was coming toward him also.

"Yes, they cannot both pass me by; but let me take a look at my first love," he said, as he turned to look at the one that was nearest.

The hull was now above the horizon, and he could see the craft distinctly.

"So distinctly, in fact, that his face turned very white, and the words rose to his lips:

"Great God! the Fates are against me, for yonder lugger is the Sea Owl, the craft of Rita, the Smuggler Queen, the woman who is the worst foe I have on earth."

CHAPTER IX.

RUN DOWN.

INVOLUNTARILY, when the youth in the coffin craft made the discovery he did, he put the boat about and started in flight, although he knew it was utterly useless, for well he understood that the swift-sailing lugger must overhaul him within an hour or two.

Still it gave him time for thought, and he put off the evil hour as long as he could.

He had suffered much on that craft in his wake, and at the hands of her who was its Lady Captain, as her crew called her.

A planter yachtsman, though a boy in years, he had won his rank of midshipman in the navy

by his breaking up the band of smugglers commanded by the Lady Captain's father, and he had himself killed the Smuggler King; hence the vow of revenge made by the outlawed girl against him.

Yet, even after this he had set her free, to find himself a fellow-passenger with her upon the good ship Vulture, bound from New Orleans to Mobile, with a crew on board that were under one who was to raise a mutiny and seize her for the rich freight she carried, and the Smuggler Queen for the jewels she was known to have with her.

That leader of the mutiny was none other than the son of the Witch of the Haunted Island, and he had been thwarted in his deviltry toward the Lady Captain by the Planter Midshipman, the very one whom she sought to kill and thus avenge her father.

In the excitement of the mutiny the Vulture had gone upon the island, and the crew, with the mutiny leader had been washed ashore, to meet a fate far worse at the teeth of the savage bloodhounds, excepting Perdido, the Witch's son, who as the reader knows, was taken prisoner and afterward released in honor.

Upon that fated night the midshipman had saved the life of the Lady Captain, in an open boat they had escaped from the island, and a strange circumstance had caused them to be picked up by the Sea Owl, the only craft of the smuggler fleet that had escaped capture at the hands of the youth, and whose destinies were controlled by the Smuggler Queen herself.

With revenge far deeper than gratitude she had placed her preserver in irons, and had then threatened to have him thrown overboard near the Witch's Island, where she believed certain death awaited him; but he had himself sprung into the sea and swam for the island, to be picked up by the Giant Slave in his coffin craft.

Now, after all he had suffered, he was again to fall into the hands of the woman who was his bitterest foe—a woman who, though exquisitely beautiful in face and form, was a fiend in heart, and, the daughter of a Smuggler King, and wife of the pirate Sea Ghoul, was so accustomed to red scenes and sad scenes that she felt not for the sufferings of others.

Born on the Gulf shores, of a family that dated its ancestry far back, with a fortune left to himself and his beautiful sister Maud, Irving Brandt, the young midshipman, lying against fate in his coffin craft, had known much of strange adventure and of sorrow in his young life.

His father, Colonel Rupert Brandt, believed to be a man of enormous wealth, was living on an income and could not touch the inheritance of his two children, for the curse of his life had been gambling, and the wills had been so made that it took the power out of his hands to beggar his son and daughter.

Engaging a tutor for his son that tutor had fallen in love with Maud, as she had with him, and envious and jealous rivals had sought to destroy him.

Among these rivals, the most wicked and persistent had been Barton Keys, whose crimes becoming known, he had been forced to give up his proud name and fly for his life.

In that flight he had been aided by the Smuggler Queen and her father, when, casting off the mask of honor, he had turned to piracy, and soon became known as the Sea Ghoul.

With power thus given him, Barton Keys, the Pirate Planter, had kidnapped the tutor, Bradford Carr, and long held him a prisoner in irons on his vessel, giving the world the idea that he, the tutor, was the pirate.

But, at last, the Sea Ghoul had been captured by the Sea Fox, a one-time rover himself, and thrown into prison in New Orleans, and his tutor released from his cruel captivity.

But the fear of the dread pirate had driven Colonel Brandt and his family to leave their lovely plantation home, and seek a residence in the city.

With her husband, the Sea Ghoul, for she was married to him in prison, the Smuggler Queen, after as she believed, the consummation of her revenge against Midshipman Brandt, devoted the energies of her ferile brain and daring nature, to effecting his escape, and so well did she lay her plans that she succeeded in releasing him when rescue seemed utterly impossible.

All these things did the young midshipman have pass through his mind, excepting the rescue of the dreaded Sea Ghoul, which he knew not of, for it was after leaving him in the sea off the Witch's Island, that she had sailed to effect the release of her pirate husband.

The reader can therefore readily understand how the brave heart of the youth sunk within him when he felt that he was again to fall into the power of the woman who so hated him, that she cast away from her all gratitude for the services he had rendered her.

"I have escaped often before, but I do not see my way clear now," he muttered, as he saw the fleet lugger rapidly overhauling him.

The other sail was in sight, and nearing rapidly, though her hull was yet below the horizon, so he could hold no hope for rescue there, as the smuggler was now not over a mile astern.

But he held on his way, expecting a shot every

minute from the twelve-pounder bow-guns he knew the lugger carried.

"They have her disguised well, with that false bow and stern, and those old patched sails, too small for her spars," he said, as he gazed at her.

"Surely, she'd pass as an honest coaster anywhere," he said, as she drew nearer.

"Well, whatever comes, I'll meet it; but I'll wager high they won't take my coffin craft as a prize."

A short while after the lugger ran near, and looking back, the youth's face grew a shade paler, as he said:

"As I live! there stands Barton Keys, the Sea Ghoul! The Lady Captain has rescued him!

"Ay, and Chester Granger too, another of Maud's old beaux, and now the Smuggler Queen's lieutenant. A precious pair they are, and fit company for my Lady Captain, whose revenge I must now feel once more.

"Ah! they hail; and now to know my fate," and he sighed, though his daring face did not lose its look of courage, or his hand quiver that held the tiller.

CHAPTER X.

THE LADY MAUD'S FLIGHT.

UPON the deck of the lugger, which has been so swiftly chasing the coffin craft, were, besides the crew of half a score, three forms.

There, on the quarter-deck, stood Chester Granger, fallen from grace to a smuggler lieutenant, holding the helm.

Near him were the other two of the trio, the one a man of superb presence, and wearing upon his face a look of nobleness that should never have been stamped upon the features of one whose heart was so black with crime.

By his side stood a woman, and yet one who seemed scarcely more than a girl in years. She was dressed in a becoming costume for the sea, and it fitted her elegant, willowy form to perfection, while her face was a study for an artist, so full was it of passion, expression and beauty of a rare order, blended with a look of fearlessness and daring that a man might have envied.

The first, Chester Granger, the smuggler lieutenant, at one time was a young planter of honor, but had become the tool of Barton Keys, and had gone from bad to worse until his career had become that of an outlaw. Force of circumstances, rather than a naturally bad heart, had made him what he was.

The second was Barton Keys, whose love of gold had made him a very devil, and who had just been rescued from beneath the very shadow of the gallows by his devoted wife, whom he did not love, his ambition, his revenge, being to one day get Maud Brandt into his power.

The third of the little group was Rita, the Lady Captain, and Smuggler Queen, as she was called by her crew, and in whom the spirit of revenge burned continually.

With a fearless mien Brandt, the midshipman, approached his foes, while the pirate chief called out:

"Knock a hole in that accursed sailing coffin, and send it to the bottom."

This order was obeyed with great alacrity by the lugger's crew, who cared not to have the ghastly-looking boat alongside.

"Well, Midshipman Brandt, we meet again," said the Smuggler Queen, with a triumphant smile, as the youth faced the trio.

"I am sorry to say, lady, that we do," was the frank response.

"You escaped from the Witch's Island, it seems?" she continued.

"Certainly, or I would not be here."

"This time there shall be no escape for you."

"Perhaps; but I see that you, Barton Keys, the pirate, have escaped, and a millionaire would not have wagered a peso on your chances not to be hanged," was the bold reply.

"Yes, I have escaped, and I shall make the name of the Sea Ghoul more feared than ever," answered the pirate.

"Sail ho!" came from the lookout, as though a warning to those on deck that the stranger was creeping up, for she had been discovered long before.

"Ay, ay; now we can see to that craft, as we have run this bold boy down."

"Mr. Granger, put your prisoner in irons until we decide his fate," commanded the chief.

In the mean time the stranger came booming along under a fair breeze.

Then, as though suddenly awakening to a sense of danger, she put about and went flying away as though in flight.

Instantly the smuggler craft was put in pursuit, and an exciting chase began.

The stranger was also one of those trim, yacht-built luggers used by planters in earlier days.

She carried a great spread of canvas, was sharp forward, and forged through the waters at a great rate of speed.

Upon her decks, lying down, as though so ordered, were a number of seamen in uniform, while half a score of negroes, evidently her crew, were visible here and there, attending to their duties.

Upon the quarter-deck stood four persons, one a youngster, evidently a middy, who had the helm, and three others.

One of these was a man not unlike in majestic form and handsome face, the pirate, Barton Keys.

He was dressed in a free-and-easy yachting suit, and was talking to a young girl, who was leaning on the high bulwarks and watching the smuggler craft.

Her face was beautiful in the extreme, one of those faces that carries the imprint of a pure and noble nature.

She was dressed in a jaunty suit, fitted for a cruise, and her every movement was graceful, while her form was perfectly molded.

Near them, examining the lugger through a glass, was an elderly gentleman with a military air.

"Carr, that lugger is picking up a small boat, which she has hitherto concealed from us, being between," remarked the elderly gentleman.

The young man addressed took the glass, and after a moment said:

"Colonel Brandt, as I supposed, when I bade the white seamen not show themselves, yonder craft is an outlaw, and more, I recognize her as the Sea Owl!"

"What! the craft of the Smuggler Queen?" cried Colonel Brandt, while the maiden started and turned slightly pale.

"Yes, colonel, but she is well disguised."

"What do you say about it, Carr?"

"Ask our young middy here, who has so kindly accompanied us on our cruise, to use his men to make a valuable capture," and Bradford Carr turned to the middy at the helm, who said, eagerly:

"It would be a grand idea, sir, for though I was sent with you in your yacht, to try and find the Vulture, or learn her fate, we could easily make the capture first."

"Yes, and keep on our hunt for the Vulture afterward."

"Ah! Carr, I feel that I shall not find that ship, for she must have gone down in that fearful storm, or been seized by pirates."

"I tell you, I fear for my poor boy, who took passage in her," and the colonel spoke in a low tone.

But it reached the ears of Maud Brandt, who turned and said, quickly:

"Father, I cannot believe that harm has befallen brother Irving, for he always comes out in safety, no matter what the scrape."

"True, he sailed on a vessel that should long ago have reached port; but I believe he will turn up in good time."

"I am glad you are hopeful, my daughter; but what will you do, Mr. Carr, for the yacht is in your hands?"

"I see but half a score of men on the lugger's deck, colonel, so I shall play a trick on him."

"What shall it be?"

"Send the white seamen below, show the yacht's black sailors above, and fly."

"But we can outrun the outlaw."

"Not with drags thrown out, and I'll do that at once."

Five minutes after, the yacht was in full flight but with "drags" holding her back, though she had all sail set, the smuggler craft steadily gained on her, and all knew that before long the death-struggle must come.

CHAPTER XI.

THE STRANGE SAIL.

WHILE the smuggler craft, Sea Owl, is chasing the planter's yacht, Lady Maud, and with every prospect of receiving a surprise by no means desired, I will beg my readers to return with me to the Witch's Island, at the time of the escape of Midshipman Brandt.

The old Witch had gone to the "field of sport," accompanied by her son and the Giant Slave, with every hope that she would witness the chase of her victims by bloodhounds.

What the Giant Slave thought, his face did not show; but Perdido, the Witch's son, took rare joy in the thought that the daring midshipman, who had thwarted his mutiny on the Vulture, and afterward defeated him in personal combat before his mother and her slave, would soon end his career.

Their horror then can be imagined when they beheld the flying youth unloose from about his waist a long rope, throw it about the lightning-riven trunk and go over the cliff to safety.

"Great Furies! he has escaped from the dogs!" shrieked the infuriated Witch. "Call the hounds off, slave, and let us fly for the cave, or he will be off in one of the boats!"

The long call of the Giant Slave brought the baying dogs back from the cliff, and then the trio of strange beings ran along the beach toward the cave at full speed, the hounds joining them, and going with them in the race.

Turning the point near the ravine's entrance, they beheld the plucky middy on the deck of the coffin craft getting up sail.

Ere they reached the cave they saw him head boldly seaward, wave them a farewell, and dash fearlessly through the breakers rushing in the inlet.

They hoped to see him swamp the boat in the wild sea there, but he passed through the curling waves in safety to the smoother sea beyond, and in all haste they began to bend the sails upon the smack.

It was no light task; but they worked with rapid hands, completed their task, set sail and headed out of the cove.

But darkness had now come on, and the coffin craft had become lost in the gloom, and they were forced to put back, the Witch and her son furious at the escape of the midshipman.

Seeking the fire in front of the Witch's cavern, they sat down to talk over the affair.

"We cannot remain on this island," said the Witch at last.

"Why not, mother?" asked the son.

"Because that accursed boy will bring down a crew upon us that will soon end our days."

"Do you possibly think that he can reach a haven in that frail boat?"

"Yes, he will reach a place of safety."

"But not for days?"

"He will reach it."

"Suppose it storms?"

Then the deep tones of the Giant Slave answered:

"He will reach a port, calm or storm, for he has it in him to do it."

"I believe you, slave, he will, and hence we cannot remain here."

"But whither go, mother?" and Perdido asked the question with deep interest, for he did not care for a life on a desolate island, and had no desire to play wizard.

He knew that his mother had vast quantities of valuable booty, taken from wrecks that had come ashore, not to speak of the fortune in gems which she carried about her.

If they had to leave the Haunted Island, his desire was to go to some city where he could live in luxury; therefore he waited with deepest interest for the reply of his Witch mother.

It soon came.

"There is an island many leagues from here, which, I have been told by the few prisoners whom we have allowed to live for a while among us, is called Death Isle, on account of the many wrecks upon it. It is bleak, I believe, and with but one inlet to reach its shores; but the breaker the better for us."

"Once it was said to be the haunt of a wizard but now it is deserted. If there are dwellers upon it, they must give place to us."

"So say I," was the answer of the Giant Slave, and Perdido dared not do other than yield consent; but he fretted under his captivity.

"Then we sail soon for the Death Island?" asked the Giant Slave.

"Yes, we will get our best booty ready tomorrow and load the smack with it, and I shall carry my frescoing too," and the Witch pointed to the skulls and bones about her.

Thus it was decided, and the three, so strangely met, so strangely clinging together, sought rest for the night.

But bright and early they were up, and the smack, a little craft of twenty tons, was put in perfect condition for the cruise, and the valuable booty first taken from the store-huts and placed on board in the hold.

It was toward sunset that the quick eye of the giant fell upon a sail. A schooner was approaching the island, and coming on at a telling pace.

"Sail ho!" he sung out, in his deep tones, and the cry brought the Witch and Perdido to his side.

"Ha! she comes this way!" Perdido soon announced.

"Yes, and is an armed craft. Can the boy have been picked up by a cruiser?" and the Witch turned pale, giving her tattooed face a most ghastly look.

"If it is a cruiser and the boy has been picked up by her, then our doom is sealed," added the Slave Hercules.

"But can she get in through the breakers?" anxiously asked Perdido.

"Yes, her boats can, and the youth can pilot them," was the response.

"I'll tell you, mother, if it is a vessel-of-war let me appear as your prisoner, and I, being free, can rescue you and English," said Perdido.

If the Witch saw through his cowardice, her face did not show it; but the Giant Slave did and responded:

"You forget that the young midshipman knows you as you are, Senor Perdido."

"Yes," was the low reply, and Perdido felt that he too was doomed with the others, and turned his eyes anxiously upon the coming craft, which was now distinctly seen to be an armed schooner, and her course lay straight for the inlet between the reefs, and soon after darkness had fallen she would drop anchor.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SKELETON PILOT.

THAT the three persons on the island were alarmed, there was no doubt, by the presence of the coming schooner, and well they deserved the heart-pangs that were upon them. The Witch was pale and nervous, the Giant Slave calm, though by no means indifferent, and Perdido was pallid and trembling.

"Let us try and keep them off with weird display," Perdido suggested.

"Bah! you forget the boy cannot be alarmed," returned the Witch, with some anger in her tones.

"There are the dogs," further suggested Perdido.

"They will quickly fall under the fire of the sailors."

"My God! what can we do?" and the young man grew very anxious.

"Await our doom with a bold front," came in the deep tones of the Giant Slave.

Then he turned a glass upon the coming schooner, and as the last lingering rays of the setting sun fell upon the craft, he saw something that caused him to start.

"Mother Witch, yonder craft flies the black flag!" he suddenly cried out in a voice that had the ring of joy in it.

The Witch seized the glass from the slave's hands and bent it upon the schooner, while Perdido's face flushed with delight and hope.

"I see the flag distinctly, for the sun lights it up well. It is a black field, a white skeleton form in the center, which grasps in one hand a red sword, and in the other a golden anchor," the Witch slowly announced.

"Then a buccaneer can mean us no harm," Perdido remarked.

"No, and perhaps yes. It will be night before he can land, and we will be prepared to receive him; but why he comes here I cannot tell. Slave I will go to my cabin and dress to receive guests. Perdido, come with me, and I will tell you your duties."

"Slave, watch the schooner and report to me; but first put on your skeleton suit and meet them in your coffin skiff."

"Yes, Mother Witch," answered the Giant Slave, obediently, and the woman and her son walked away, leaving the Hercules standing amid the clump of trees watching the coming vessel.

Suddenly he stepped to a crevice in the bank and took therefrom a huge black flag. This he ran up on a branchless pine, and as it fluttered out it displayed a seemingly spirit form floating in the air.

It was at once discovered on board the schooner, and the pirate flag was dipped three times, as though to salute it.

Darkness now settled upon the sea, and the giant walked hastily to the ravine and disappeared in his hut. Soon he came out, and in the dim light looked like some huge skeleton gliding along, for he had on a black suit, striped and painted in white to resemble the fleshless human frame.

In his hands he carried a lantern, the light of which he shielded.

Walking down to the cove, he threw off a canvas covering that protected a small skiff, and it was revealed in the shape of a coffin, and colored jet-black.

This he launched, and taking an oar with a double blade, he got in, placed the lantern before him in the bow, so as to reveal his hideous proportions distinctly, and also to cast its light upon the ghastly craft, and paddled slowly out of the cove.

The sea was not rough, and the breakers in the inlet were not heavy, so he passed through them with ease.

There he found the schooner had just come to anchor, and he hailed in his deep voice:

"Ho, the schooner!"

"Ahoy, the boat!" came the answer, yet in not a very confident tone, as though the speaker longed to be far away from the ghastly skiff and its still more ghastly occupant.

"Why seeks the Skeleton Schooner the Witch's Isle?" cried the Giant Slave, sternly.

Then he heard a chorus of voices in earnest conversation, while one said:

"He knows us to be the Skeleton Schooner."

"Aha, it is the craft of that name of which I have heard," muttered the Giant Slave, and then he called out sternly:

"Answer me! Why comes the Skeleton Schooner to an anchor off the Witch's Island?"

"I have come to seek the Mother Witch, to receive from her an amulet to protect my vessel from doom, for we met last night upon the high seas a Death Craft," was the answer in a manly voice.

"Ay, ay! Come on shore, and I will see if the Mother Witch will receive you," answered the Giant Slave.

The creaking of blocks was soon after heard, as a boat was being lowered from the davits, and then the steady stroke of oars.

"Six oarsmen, and as many more in the boat," muttered the Giant Slave, as he paddled backward to the cove, still keeping the light upon him, so as to reveal him in all his ghastliness.

Keeping ahead of the boat, he led it into the cove to a landing, and then suddenly extinguishing his lantern, he stepped out and confronted the pirate captain just as he sprung on shore.

In spite of himself the outlaw sprang back as his eyes fell upon the giant form, while those with him could not refrain from an exclamation of amazement or fear, perhaps both mingled.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN SEARCH OF AN AMULET.

"WELL, Senor Pirate, you would see the Mother Witch?" and the deep tones of the giant

fell with ominous sound upon the ears of the buccaneer.

"I would see her, to ask her aid," he said, in low response.

"Why need you her aid?"

"My vessel sighted a Death Craft a night ago, and you know it is said such dooms her to loss, unless her captain wears an amulet given by a witch, and I braved all to come here."

"Wait and I will soon see if the Mother Witch will give you an audience," and the giant glided away in the darkness.

A rapid walk brought him to the ravine.

There a fire of logs had been lighted, fronting the cavern, which had been dug by the slave.

It was an appalling chamber to look into, for skeleton forms stood on guard on either side, their bony hands grasping boarding-pikes, and the walls and ceiling were really frescoed with human bones!

In a huge chair, made of bones, sat the Witch. Her left hand rested upon a skull, which formed the arm of the seat, and her right held a wand painted black.

She was robed in white, her long hair had been dyed red, giving her a fearful appearance, and the tattooing upon her arms, of reptiles, and on her face and back, were hideous to look upon.

Around her wrists and neck were strings of precious gems, and a crown of thorns rested upon her head.

A large skull served as a footstool, and upon the back of her chair sat a raven, an owl and a parrot, the former croaking, the owl hooting dismal, and the parrot chattering forth ominous words and wailing like a lost soul.

Pacing to and fro was the tall form of Perdido, and yet no one would have recognized him, so strangely was he gotten up.

What appeared to be his face, when he stood still, as the Giant Slave approached, was a skull, half-hidden beneath a cowl, while his attire was that of a monk, beads, cross and all.

But turning, the other half of him displayed a perfect Mephisto in red, grinning features, burning eyes, hook nose, two small horns, and the claws in place of feet and hands.

It certainly was a fearful sight that the firelight revealed, to the eyes of the Giant Slave.

But he seemed not to regard it, and advancing, said:

"The vessel is a pirate known as the Skeleton Schooner. Her captain, two officers, and six oarsmen have landed, and the commander reports having seen a Death Craft at sea a night ago."

"It was doubtless the boy in the coffin craft," said the Witch.

"Yes, Mother Witch; but he has come to have you take the doom off of his vessel, with the power of your witchcraft."

"Ah! he has gold to pay for it?"

"He is a pirate."

"Then he should have gold in plenty."

"And you will see him?"

"Bring him hither."

"All?"

"If they so wish," was the reply; and the Giant Slave strode away in the darkness.

The pirates had not dared to move away from their boat, and were anxiously watching for the return of their Skeleton Pilot.

They were evidently deeply alarmed at having met the coffin craft upon the high seas, for their superstition told them that they were doomed according to the legends of the sea.

Suddenly they saw him approaching, and they held their breath in suspense.

"Senor Pirate, the Mother Witch knew of your coming, and is ready to receive you," announced the Giant Slave.

"Alone?"

"As the Senor Pirate pleases."

"Come, Donald; come, Barkis—you and the lads, for, by the Virgin! I am afraid to go alone," said the pirate captain, and his two officers and the seamen followed him in awe.

Going ahead, the Giant Slave led the way in a slow, funereal step, and just as they started, in the distance was heard the wild shriek of a night-bird, followed by a burst of mocking laughter, and then the dismal howling of half a score of hounds.

Though men accustomed to face death daily, when brought in contact with the supernatural, the pirates shuddered in spite of themselves, and momentarily hesitated, as if fearing to go on.

"Come! he who halts here is lost," came in the deep tones of the Giant Slave, and quickly they rushed forward again, but their pace was toned down once more to the measured tread of their guide.

On they marched, while the hounds howled in dismal chorus, and soon they came into the entrance to the ravine, and the full glare of the firelight.

As they drew near, and their eyes beheld the appalling scene before them, the old Witch in her chair, the skeleton sentinels, the bone fresco of the cavern, the three ominous-looking birds, the hounds squatting in a circle around the fire and howling, and Perdido pacing back and forth, displaying first the monk and then Mephisto as he turned, the group of pirates again came to a halt, and a sudden one.

Their teeth seemed to chatter, their knees smote together, and they seemed about to dart away as fast as their trembling legs could carry them, when the Giant Slave said sternly:

"Follow me!"

In spite of themselves they obeyed, and he halted them in a line before the Witch.

They doffed their hats and stood in silent awe, while the Giant Slave said solemnly:

"Mother Witch, the Senor Pirate has come before you to seek your aid. He will speak to you."

The burning eyes of the woman turned upon the outlaw chief as though to look him through.

He was a young man, a Spaniard evidently, though speaking English well.

His face was fearless but cruel, and he seemed one who loved red deeds as he did gold.

"Yes, Mother Witch, I seek your aid, for my craft has become accursed, and myself and crew are doomed, unless you give me an amulet to save us."

He spoke in a voice as firm as he could command, and in reply the woman said:

"Your vessel, in cruising, met a Death Craft?"

"Yes, Mother Witch."

"By night?"

"Yes; for they are not seen by day."

"You are wrong, they are."

"I never heard so before."

"Then know so now."

"Your knowledge is great, Mother Witch."

"Had you a dead body on board your schooner when you saw the Death Craft?"

"No."

"Then you are doomed," said the woman, hoarsely, and the pirate started at her words and became livid.

"Without your aid, Mother Witch, we know it."

"And you expect me to destroy the spell upon your vessel and yourselves?"

"We hope for it, Mother Witch."

"Gold must flow like water to get me to place an amulet about your neck."

"I have gold in plenty, good Mother."

"Where?"

"It is here, for I brought it with me," and he took from two of his men bags that they carried of the precious metal.

"Pour it there, one in each skull," and as the woman spoke, the Giant Slave placed skulls, hollowed out, upon the ground, and the gold was poured into them.

"Now match those with eleven more just like them, and I will save you and your vessel with my witchcraft," sternly said the Witch, while the Giant Slave brought out of the cavern the other eleven empty skulls, and placed them in a row.

At this the pirate captain winced.

He loved his gold, but he loved his life, and said:

"I have no more with me, Mother Witch."

"My slave will return with you to your vessel and get more."

With a sigh the pirate chief turned away, and as his comrades were about to follow, the Giant Slave bade them remain, and walked off alone with the outlaw.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SLAVE REBELS.

UPON reaching the cove, the Giant Slave bade the pirate captain get into his skiff, and in silence he obeyed.

Without lighting the lantern, he seized the paddle and sent the light skiff skimming over the waves out toward the anchored schooner.

The crew were anxiously pacing the deck, the one officer on board, and in charge, having his eyes fixed on the shore, for all were nervous about their comrades who had landed, and the doom, which their superstitious fears caused them to believe their craft must suffer.

The skiff coming out was soon discovered, and the officer hailed:

"Ay, ay, Miguel, I am here," called out the captain, and the skiff soon ran alongside, and boarding, the pirate was followed into his cabin by the Giant Slave.

Out of a trap in the flooring, which he unlocked, he handed out several large bags of gold, and asked:

"Will these fill the skulls, think you?"

"Yes, senor."

"Then I will have my men carry them."

"I will do so," and with an ease that was remarkable the giant raised the bags, and the two left the cabin and the schooner.

"You have a fine vessel, senor," said the giant, as he paddled away, the men standing gazing at him in awe.

"Yes, and fleet as the wind."

"A large crew."

"No, for my men have been thinned out of late in combats, and I lost half a score one night in a storm, so have but forty all told, but I shall run for the Indies and recruit from here."

The Giant Slave said no more, but upon reaching the shore took up the gold and started for the ravine, the pirate following him.

Arriving before the Witch, who had sat in silence the while, eying each man in turn, until

they were all as uncomfortable as possible, the gold was poured into the skulls and more than filled them all.

"Give that to the slave," said the Witch, as the pirate captain was about to appropriate the amount over.

With a sigh he handed it over, for every gold-piece was as dear to him as a drop of blood.

"Now you desire to sail the seas without fear?" said the Witch, her eyes gloating on the gold.

"Yes, Mother Witch."

"You wish fair weather?"

"Yes."

"You wish to sight rich prizes?"

"Yes."

"You wish Death to keep away from your deck?"

"I do."

"You desire that the doom now resting upon your vessel be taken off?"

"I do."

"You would sail without fear of the galloves?"

"Gladly would I."

"You believe in witchcraft?"

"Most fully, good Mother."

"And in my power to aid you?"

"Did I not, never would I have come hither."

"Then I will grant you your wishes, and give you an amulet to shield you."

"Now stand there while the amulet has the mystic power put upon it."

The Giant Slave stepped forward, placed the men in a circle around the fire, and clasped their hands together, and said sternly:

"As you love life, close your eyes and do not open them until I give you permission."

The pirates stood in as holy awe of the Giant Slave as they did of the Witch, almost, and their eyes closed simultaneously.

Then the man beckoned to the Witch, and she followed him down the ravine into the shadow beyond the firelight.

Seeing his mother depart, Perdido, representing the monk and Mephisto, quickly followed.

"You wish me, slave?" said the woman, evidently believing that the man had something of importance to communicate.

"Yes, Mother Witch," he answered, solemnly.

"Well?"

"You desire to leave this island?"

"I do as you know."

"You fear the return of the midshipman with help to destroy us?"

"I do."

"It is your wish to seek Death Island?"

"Yes."

"In the smack?"

"Yes."

"Better conveyance is at your hand."

"What do you mean?"

"The schooner that lies off yonder."

"Ha! would you have me lose my power?"

"Oh, no; but I will convey you to Death Island."

"You?"

"Yes."

"I do not understand you, slave."

"I will convey you to Death Island in yonder schooner."

"What power have you over that vessel?"

"I intend to command her," was the cool reply.

The Witch started back with a look of amazement, and gazed upon the man for an instant.

Then she said, hoarsely:

"Slave, have you gone mad?"

"Oh, no, but my term of service to you has expired."

"Your term of service?" and the woman repeated the words in a dazed kind of way.

"So I said," he answered, coolly.

"Explain your words, slave."

"With pleasure, as you seem to have forgotten. Do you remember five years ago this night a vessel was wrecked on this island, and you found me upon her deck?"

"I do."

"I was the only one that lived of all on board."

"I remember."

"You appeared before me like a ghost, and, knowing that we had struck on the Haunted Island, I believed you a spirit, and you held power over me."

"Well, slave?"

The Giant Buccaneer.

"You offer to do all this? Will you explain how?"

"I intend to seize yonder schooner."

"You cannot."

"I will, and I expect your aid."

"Never."

"I say, yes."

"And I say never will I aid you!" cried the Witch, and her son stepped quickly to her side, as though fearing trouble, though he dared not face the Giant Slave in his anger, and when he had cast off the shackles that had held him in bondage for five long years.

CHAPTER XV.

CATCHING A TARTAR.

BUT let us return to the chase of the Lady Maud by the Sea Owl.

The yacht, held back by her drags, was yet making fair time, so that the smuggled craft did not overhaul her very rapidly; but at last coming near opened fire.

In spite of her father's command, and her lover's entreaties, Maud Brant refused to leave the deck, declaring that she would share the danger that they did.

As the shots flew over and about the yacht she did not flinch, but coolly watched for the result, while her eyes flashed as Bradford Carr ordered the stern guns of the Lady Maud to be cleared for action and manned.

He did not wish to harm the smuggler and thus be enabled to run away from him, for he wished to give him a surprise by allowing him to board the yacht.

For this reason he did not allow the negro gunner to sight the gun, but did so himself.

His shots, of course, flew wild, while the pirate, having recognized on the deck his successful rival, Bradford Carr and Maud and her father, while he held in irons on board Irving Brant, was determined to visit his vengeance upon all at once, as soon as he captured the yacht.

For this reason he ordered his gunner to fire high, and under no circumstances to allow a shot to touch the hull of the yacht.

Nearer and nearer the smuggler crept until, with a wild cry of alarm, Maud, who was looking at those on her deck through her glass, recognized her brother.

"Oh, father! Irving is on that vessel a prisoner."

"See! he stands there in irons."

The colonel seized the glass and said quickly:

"Alas! it is too true, my child."

Then Bradford Carr turned from the guns and took the glass.

After a moment he said:

"Yes, it is Irving, and more, Colonel Brant, we shall take the Sea Ghoul prisoner, and Chester Granger too, for they both stand by the side of the Smuggler Queen."

Again the father and daughter looked through the glass and in turn recognized those of whom Bradford Carr had spoken.

"But do you think there can be any mishap, Carr?" asked the colonel, anxiously, glancing at Maud, as he felt what it would be for her to fall into the power of Barton Keys.

"No, sir, we will capture yonder craft, and if I find we cannot, I shall throw a torch in the magazine and blow us all up together," was the determined remark of Bradford Carr.

"It were better so," muttered the brave old gambler planter.

The vessels were now near together, and soon after Barton Keys hailed:

"Ho, the Lady Maud!"

"Ahoy the pirate Sea Ghoul!" answered Bradford Carr.

"Surrender that craft, or I board and cut your crew down!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" answered the young tutor, and he luffed up, while the Sea Owl was laid alongside, and over her sides came Barton Keys, followed by the smuggler crew.

But just then, out of the cabin companionway of the yacht burst a line of smoke, and a dozen muskets sounded a death-knell to the boarders, while, before he could recover from his surprise, the Sea Ghoul was disarmed by Bradford Carr and quickly made prisoner.

Believing victory theirs, both the Lady Captain and Chester Granger seemed dazed, and they too were seized by the middy and his seamen, and the smuggler lieutenant was placed in irons, while Irving Brant was released from the manacles and chains that weighed him down.

As the rescued midshipman sprung on the deck of his gallant yacht and was greeted by his sister, father and the tutor, the latter cried:

"Now, Irving, the two vessels and the prisoners are in your hands, for you are a naval officer."

"Thank you, Mr. Carr; and I accept the command, for I have a duty to perform."

"Ho, lads! rig a rope on that smuggler craft, to hang that man upon," and he pointed toward Barton Keys, who stood near, in irons, and with his livid face writhing with passion.

"Ha! you dare not hang me without a trial," he hissed through his teeth.

"I command here, Barton Keys; and, knowing you as you are, I shall save all trouble and

dread of your again escaping by hanging you now," was the stern reply of the midshipman.

Colonel Brandt and Bradford Carr uttered no word against it, and Maud, after a glance at the Smuggler Queen, had gone into the cabin of the yacht.

"Take that woman into her cabin!" ordered Irving, pointing to the Lady Captain.

At his command, a cry escaped her lips like that of a wounded tigress, and glaring hatred upon him, she started toward him, to stagger and fall her length upon the deck.

"She has fainted; it is better so; and now, lads, up with this Sea Ghoul and rid the earth of his presence!" cried the midshipman, and the seamen advanced and threw a noose about the neck of the captured pirate chief.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE WITCH AND THE GIANT.

THE scene between the Witch of the Haunted Isle and the man who had been her slave for long years was a strange one.

She had always known him to be a strange being, and never, during the five years of his slavery under her, had she been able to discover anything regarding his antecedents.

His manners were refined, yes elegant, he had an education superior to most men of his time, when an education was something to be prized for its rarity.

What he had been she did not know, and, though he seemed almost free from superstition, yet he obeyed her as the hound would a master.

Suddenly he had broken out, and with that breaking, had shone a desire to lead, not to be led.

In amazement she gazed upon him, not unmixed with awe, as he stood before her, while her son, close to her side, also wondered and was awed.

"I say you will help me, woman," he repeated, in his deep tones.

"And to do what?"

"I will no longer live the life I have."

"I have served my time, and I have broken a spell that was cast upon me from the day of my birth."

"Now I am free, and I am poor."

"Gold is my god, and I have none to worship."

"You are rich, and I tell you frankly, woman, after I had satisfied my own conscience in serving you I intended to revenge myself by taking your riches and departing from this island, leaving you to gather more from the dead your arts brought ashore, as you would have done."

"But to-night, the last night of my bondage, opens up to me a new future."

"I am a seaman, and a thorough one, and yonder lies at anchor a schooner which I intend to command."

"Your son can be my first luff, and you and your witchcraft paraphernalia I will bear to the Death Island, and you can there live."

"You can lure vessels ashore and get their booty, and I will dispose of it for you, while I shall plow the seas as the Giant Buccaneer."

The giant spoke earnestly, and the woman listened in silence; but at last she said, firmly:

"No, you are useful to me, and you shall not break your fetters."

"You can move with me in the smack to Death Island, and there continue to serve me."

"Never! and for you to speak thus proves that you do not know me, woman."

"See here, and I mean every word I utter."

"If you do not help me to seize yonder vessel, I swear to you, by Heaven! I will drag the life out of your old tattooed body and hurl it into the sea!"

"Ay! I will throw your son after you, and then join yonder pirates, giving them your booty."

The woman started back in horror, for the suppressed tones of the giant alarmed her, while Perdido shrunk away out of reach of his arm, and felt sorry that his curiosity had lured him to the spot.

"If you aid me, all will be well."

"Now take your choice," and the man folded his arms upon his broad breast and stood waiting for a reply.

"How can I aid you?" she asked tremblingly.

"You can, with your infernal ceremonies, get those three officers one side, and send me to place them in the prison caves."

"They shall not return, I pledge you, and then you can, with wild forms of witchcraft, appall the seamen and have them in a condition that you can wholly sway their minds."

"Next, you can tell them that your secret knowledge tells you that they were doomed beyond your power to save them, and that the witches of the air command you to give the command of the vessel to one other."

"That other I will be, and we will return on board the schooner, appall the remainder of the crew into subjection, and I will be their commander, your son shall be next, and the officer on board shall be my other lieutenant."

"You know my plans now, so take your choice between aiding me to carry them out, or dying."

"Which shall it be?"

The woman was mastered, and she said, in a low tone:

"I will do as you say, slave."

"Hold! slave no longer, after this night's mummuries are over."

"English is my name."

"I obey," she said.

"And you, sir?" and the giant turned upon Perdido.

"As my mother says, I do," was the response of that worthy, pompously, but a coward when the chances were not wholly with him, had his mother said fight the giant, he would have fled with the alacrity of one of the bloodhounds, that with its mates kept up such a dismal howling up the ravine.

"Then come, Witch, and let there be no mistake," and the giant led the way back to the cavern.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE GIANT BUCCANEER.

UPON returning to the space before the cavern, the giant and his companions found the bloodhounds howling most plaintively, the birds croaking dismal, and the pirates still standing around the fire in a circle, their hands clasped, their lips pressed together and eyes shut tight.

Gliding to her chair once more, the Witch took her seat, while Perdido began to walk around the circle of men, and the giant, throwing a handful of powder into the fire, caused a sudden flash just as he cried:

"Behold, men of the sea, for the Mother Witch commands it!"

They opened their eyes, and were momentarily blinded by the glare.

Then they were ordered to keep their places, only to turn their backs to the fire.

This they did, still clasping hands, while Perdido kept up his walk around the circle.

"Men of the sea, the Witch of the Haunted Island has in vain sought an amulet.

"There is some strange drawl ack, and it falls upon the heads of three of you."

"Which are they, almighty Witch of the Isle?" cried the giant, in his deepest tones.

She arose from her chair and advanced, a red wand in her hand, with cross-bones upon one end, a child's skull on the other, and she held it out.

She seemed to be guided by some unseen power, for her eyes were closed, and the skull end of the wand touched the pirate captain.

Then the wand quickly turned and the cross-bones end touched first one, and then the other of the two under officers.

"The trouble lies with you three," she said, in her sing-song tones, while they shrunk away from the touch.

"Great God! can you not avert our doom?" cried the pirate captain.

"I will try; but you three have evidently been guilty of some crimes that even a buccaneer would shudder at."

"Slave, lead those three men to the Death Cave, and I will try my power and see if I can charm them."

"You remain here," and she addressed the seamen.

The giant led off the three officers, and a word called to his heels six of the bloodhounds.

Blindfolding them, he first took them to the cave which had been the prison of Irving Brandt, the midshipman.

Here he placed the captain.

Then he walked with the other two to the cavern which had been the prison-pen of Perdido, ere he was known to be the child of the Witch.

Here a second one was left, and the third found quarters in another of the dismal holes, frescoed with human bones, that had been dug in the sides of the ravine.

Before each cave two bloodhounds were placed, and to each prisoner the giant said:

"A while passed here will cleanse you of your crimes, by the Witch's will, if it can be done."

"Pray for your own souls' salvation until my return."

Then back to the cavern went the giant and found the Witch going through some appalling incantations that certainly had the effect of completely unnerving the pirate seamen.

At last she became silent, and raising her hands and clasping them over her eyes, she said:

"Men of the sea, the doom cannot be lifted from the lives of those three men, your leaders."

"I cannot cleanse them of their crimes, and my power fails."

"But it is given to me to behold a chief for you, and one who can lead you to victory and wealth."

"I see a huge man, one of great strength of arm and bold of heart— Ha! great God! it is my own slave!"

"Pirates! men of the sea, there stands your chief, the Giant Buccaneer!"

The men gazed upon her in wonder, and then upon the giant, who stood calm and silent.

Then she said, as she stepped toward the one who had shaken off his shackles of slavery:

"Sir Giant, I see by my powers of witch-

craft, that it is for you to become the chief of the vessel anchored off this island.

"I see, by my power, that you will lead her to victory, and store her hold with riches."

"But my power tells me that I must leave this island, where the doomed feet of those three men have trod; that I must seek other scenes, another home for me and mine, and it will be your duty to take me there."

"Come, men of the sea, and leave those doomed leaders to their fate."

"Come, go with us to your vessel, that your shipmates may greet their new chief."

"Lead on!"

Silently, and wholly awed, they obeyed.

The giant led, Perdido falling behind him, and then the seamen, with the Witch bringing up the rear and chanting a wild song in what was certainly a very beautiful voice.

As she departed the three birds fluttered about her continually, until the parrot alighted upon one shoulder, the raven on the other, and the owl upon her head.

Reaching the shore of the cove, they entered the schooner's boat, Perdido lighting two lanterns and placing them fore and aft, and the seamen seizing their oars pulled slowly out to their vessel.

In dismay the crew stood regarding the coming boat, and could they have gotten up the anchor and set sail in time to fly, gladly would they have done so.

But recognizing their shipmates at the oars partly reassured them.

Running alongside, the Witch, in all her hideousness, went over the gangway first, Perdido following with a lantern, and walking around and around her, as she reached the deck, displaying his appalling *double self*, of a monk and Satan.

"Men of the sea," called out the Witch, "I come here from my island home to say that your chief and his lieutenants sought me, to ward off the doom against you all and your vessel."

She paused, while all gathered near, standing in awed silence, and Perdido kept up his walk around and around her, his lantern casting weird shadows as he walked.

"Men of the sea, the doom I lifted from your vessel, and from yourself; but I could not keep it from off those three, and were you to sail with them, you would die some fearful death, ere another moon came round."

"But the power was given me to find a chief for you, and behold him!"

As she spoke the giant sprung over the bulwark upon the deck, and Perdido threw the light of the lantern full upon him.

There he stood in grand, majestic manhood, his arms folded upon his breast, his eyes resting upon the crew that superstition was subduing.

"This man, your Giant Buccaneer Chief, will lead you to victory, and fill your belts with gold."

"Do you accept him, or do you accept the doom that must overtake you without him?"

"Answer me!"

The crew of the boat started the cry, for cry it was, and a Spaniard shouted:

"Viva the Giant Buccaneer!"

The words were taken up with a cheer, and then the giant unfolded his arms, held out his hand for silence, and said in his deep, yet melodious tones:

"Men, I accept the charge put upon me, and I will lead you to fortune under my flag, ay, your flag that hangs there, for it suits me well."

With the doom they believed would be theirs lifted from them, the pirates cared little for the fate of their officers, and were wild with delight, while, seeking the one officer left, the giant found him so frightened that he was most tractable indeed.

Leaving Perdido on board as an awe-inspirer, the Witch and the Giant Buccaneer returned to the shore, carrying with them half a dozen of the crew who had not before gone, and set them to work getting out the bony fresco from the cavern, and the booty out of the huts.

Leaving the Witch to watch over the seamen, the giant walked on up the ravine, muttering to himself:

"Now I will see that they meet the doom that the Death Craft put upon them."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MIDSHIPMAN'S REVENGE.

It was a thrilling scene upon the deck of the Lady Maud, with Irving Brandt, the midshipman, in command, and his gray-haired father, and his tutor, Bradford Carr, standing back and leaving all to him, while Nat Manly, the middy who had come in charge of the man-of-war's men, stood gazing at the youth with an admiration his face plainly showed.

Maud had retired to the cabin; but, hearing that the Smuggler Queen had swooned away, with her womanly nature at once awakened for the unfortunate, she went to the cabin of the outlaw craft, whither the Lady Captain had been borne, and did all in her power for her.

In the mean time the black crew of the Lady Maud were obeying their young master's orders, for, as he was taking the law in his own hands,

in the punishment of the pirate chief, Irving would not allow the middy, Nat Manly, and his men to be implicated.

"But, my son," urged the colonel, "do you not think it would be better to carry the Sea Ghoul back in irons?"

"No, father, for I am on official duty for the Government, have caught a pirate on the high seas, or rather you have for me, and I shall see that he has no other chance to escape."

"Now, Mr. Keys, a word with you!" and the midshipman turned to the pirate chief, who, heavily ironed, stood near.

"Well, boy, what have you to say?" was the gruff response.

"Just this, sir, that I am responsible for your taking off at the yard-arm, and I hang you without pity or remorse—hold, let me speak."

"That I am revengeful toward you, you may say; but it is not on account of myself, as I care not what you may have done to me, and I have spared your pirate wife time and again, although she hunted me down with a persistency that was like the hatred of a tigress."

"But you have struck at those I love."

"You are well-born, had an honorable life before you, but, squandering your money, you sought to drag my sister down to your level by making her your wife, merely to get her fortune."

"To do this, when we were all spending the summer at the Blue Anchor Inn, you cowardly shot down Soule Ravelle, whom my sister had been pledged to from infancy, to get rid of him, and also pay a gambling debt you owed him."

"But you did not end here, for you forced your tool, Chester Granger, who owed you largely, to aid you, and charged my tutor there, Bradford Carr, with the murder, and he would have died on the gallows but for me."

"Escaping from prison, he became what seamen called the Pirate Priest, but who was in reality a hunter of outlaws, and thus he made known through Chester Granger, who betrayed you, your crimes."

"You were sentenced to be hanged for the murder of Soule Ravelle, but escaping, you took to piracy, capturing Bradford Carr, and made the world believe he had become in reality a Pirate Priest, while you had him in irons below your decks."

"Again he was rescued, and you were taken, and you had laid a deep plan of deviltry to, in disguise, get my father, whose vice of gambling you well knew, into your power, force him thereby to urge your suit with my sister, she believing you to be the French gentleman of wealth you passed off as, and in the end destroy all of my name."

"But the gallant Sea Fox thwarted you, and you were again doomed, when lo! I find you at sea in that craft, and your outlaw wife with you, and whose devotion to you should turn you from your crimes."

"Picking me up at sea, you intended to kill me, and also wreak your vengeance on those on this yacht; but the biter was bitten, and you are in irons."

"Now, Barton Keys, I am your judge, jury and executioner."

"I have reviewed your crimes, and I pronounce your sentence, which is, that you die within five minutes, strung up by yonder rope which has been rigged for you."

"Woods, hand me the noose."

The negro mate addressed gave into the midshipman's hand the noose-end of the rope.

"Woods, stand there with the slack, you and four of your men, and stand by to haul when I give the order!"

The silence of death now fell upon all, and Barton Keys was as livid and hard-faced as though life had already left his body.

Stepping toward him, the midshipman, also deadly pale, but firm as a rock, placed the noose over his head and adjusted the slip-knot.

Then he pinioned the manacled arms and led the pirate to the spot beneath the block through which the rope ran.

Barton Keys was firm, and there seemed to rest in his eyes a hope that the youth's act was to frighten him, and that he would not dare to hang him.

But as he stepped from him, the pirate called out:

"Colonel Brandt, will you see your son commit murder?"

"My son, sir, is an officer of the navy, and he knows his own business best!" was the cold response of the planter.

Then the pirate turned to the tutor, and cried:

"Mr. Carr, you should know, sir, that if Irving Brandt is allowed to hang me, he will get himself into trouble."

"Midshipman Brandt is no longer under my tuition, sir; it is a case where the boy is father to the man, Mr. Keys, and I will not interfere," answered Bradford Carr.

In despair the pirate chief turned to Middy Nat Manly with:

"You, sir, as an officer of the navy, should speak up against this outrage."

"I am not in command, sir."

"But that boy has just lately been made a midshipman, and you rank him."

"I may rank him, yes; but his acts have proven him my superior, and I'll obey him as I would the commodore," was the frank response of the handsome young middy.

"But you are aware that I have not been tried and sentenced yet."

"You should have been, and I guess Midshipman Brandt will see that the Government has no further trouble on that score."

Irving Brandt smiled grimly as the Sea Ghoul again turned to him and then said:

"You see, Mr. Keys, I take all the responsibility; but your five minutes are up, so if you dare to ask mercy of Heaven, you had better do so."

"Oh, God! there is no hope for me?" gasped the man, with terror in his face.

"*There is the hope of revenge, my husband!*"

All started at the hoarse voice, and beheld the Smuggler Queen standing in the companionway of the cabin, and gazing upon the scene.

Her hair had fallen down from its fastenings, her eyes glared like a hyena's at bay, and there was no more color in her face than in marble.

She looked like a tigress about to spring upon a foe, yet held herself back.

At sight of her all started, while Barton Keys cried, in a quivering voice:

"Boy, beware, for that woman will avenge me."

"So be it; I accept all responsibility."

"Ready there, lads!" and he addressed Woods and his four black comrades.

"Ay, ay, massa," they answered in chorus.

"Barton Keys, farewell, and may God have mercy on your crime-stained soul," said the midshipman, in impressive tones.

Then he added in a voice that rung like a bugle:

"Ready there! all together! up with the Ghoul of the Gulf!"

A cry was checked on the lips of the doomed man by the tightening of the rope about his neck, and Barton Keys was drawn struggling and dying into the air.

"Make fast, Woods, and leave him there to die!" was the stern order, while a shriek forced itself through the shut lips of the Smuggler Queen, and she sank back into the arms of the old negress, who, once her father's slave, had been her nurse from infancy.

"Quick, place her on that divan and we will revive her again; but it would be a mercy to her if she died now," sadly said Maud, her eyes full of tears.

"Twould so, missy, twould so, fer she loved him mighty heap, an' if she lib, and I guesses she will, fer she am mighty hard ter kill, she will hab de life of dat young gemmans what kill de pirate massa."

"So she will, missy, so she will," added the old negress, and at her words Maud shuddered.

But just then Irving came for her, and said that he would take the Smuggler Queen and Chester Granger, her lieutenant, with him, taking his black crew, while the other vessel would return to New Orleans with the smuggler seamen, under charge of Bradford Carr and Nat Manly, and that she and his father would accompany them.

Maud made no reply, for she had seen her brother, younger though he was than herself, developed into a man of desperate courage and iron resolve, and where others yielded to him, she could but obey.

Before she left the cabin, however, Irving had the dead body of the prairie chief cut down and cast into the sea, that Maud's eyes might not behold it, and after farewells, the two vessels swung apart and set sail, the one for New Orleans, the other for Mobile, where the young midshipman went to execute the official duties which he had been on his way to perform when wrecked in the Vulture upon the Witch's Island.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE GIANT BUCCANEER'S RED WORK.

We left the Giant Buccaneer going up the ravine toward the prison caves of the three pirate officers, who were waiting with intense anxiety to know what their fate would be.

In the ravine the Witch of the Island was watching the buccaneer seamen at the work which she had set them to do, and on board the schooner Perdido was somewhat nervous at the position in which he had been left.

Thus matters stood when the Giant Buccaneer, so suddenly come into power, wended his way to carry out his muttered threat, and with no one to interfere with his design.

Arriving at the first cave he found the two bloodhounds on guard there.

"Well, senor, it has been decided what your doom is to be," he said, quietly.

"And what is it?" eagerly asked the buccaneer officer.

"Come!" was the only reply, and the outlaw followed the giant, the two canines keeping at his heels.

To the second cave he then went, and the next outlaw was bade to follow.

Then the third, who was the captain, and he asked:

"But where?"
 "You shall soon know."
 "And what is to be our fate?"
 "That you also shall know."
 "Could the Witch aid us any?"
 "I can tell you nothing now."
 "But you do not head toward the Death Cavern?"
 "No, I lead you to a point on the island where there is a cliff overhanging the sea."

"And why there?"
 "For there it will be told you what is to be your fate!"

"You know it?"

"Yes."

"The Witch will be there?"

"You will see," and the giant relapsed into silence, paying no further attention to the questions asked him.

Leaving the ravine by a narrow cut in the cliff they reached the plateau where had taken place the chase by bloodhounds of Midshipman Brandt and, crossing it, came upon a point of the island where the cliff overhung the waters which had cut the earth away beneath by rush of tide and storm.

In his arms the giant carried a bundle, which he now unrolled, and several swords were made visible.

"Senors, now will it be given you to know your fate."

"See, I have brought your swords, for you will find use for them."

"And why?"

"Fate so orders it."

"But the Witch?"

"I speak for her."

"And what say you?"

"I say that the Mother Witch has tried to keep off from you your doom; but where you three are concerned her power fails."

"Your ship and your crew she can protect with her amulet, but not you."

"Ha! is there treachery here?" and the captain sprung forward and grasped the swords, while he threw one to each of his comrades, and kept his own weapon.

But the Giant Buccaneer did not move, or cower.

He simply said:

"You are so treacherous yourself, that you naturally suspect treachery in all others."

"Vile slave, I believe that there is treachery, and you shall die."

"Come, senors, and we'll rid the Witch of her huge slave."

With these words he advanced upon the giant, his comrades doing the same.

But suddenly the giant placed his hand over his shoulder, and drew from its scabbard, fastened adown his back, a long sword.

"Ha! you are armed, are you? But we are three to one."

"Come!"

The three pirate officers sprung forward together, the swords of the four men came together with a clash, and almost with one swoop of his blade the giant disarmed his adversaries and held them at his mercy.

They were astounded by his strength and skill, and stood in silence, as though meditating flight.

This their conqueror seemed to anticipate, for he said quickly:

"Senors, if you attempt to fly, you will be torn in pieces," and he pointed to the six bloodhounds, which the pirates had momentarily forgotten.

They saw their danger, and the captain said:

"Well, what now, sir?"

"I desire to make known the commands of the Mother Witch."

"And we will hear them."

"I was commanded to lead you here, and to bring your swords."

"Here you are to decide which one of you will return to the schooner as commander, for the survivor of the three can alone be chief of the vessel."

"Does that mean that we are to fight you?"

"If so, our case is hopeless."

"Oh, no, you are to fight each other, and as you are the ranking officer, you must first meet your junior lieutenant."

The proposition was received in silence. None of the trio had any particular regard for each other, and, where life was at stake, they were each one willing to kill those they opposed and become the survivor.

The giant meanwhile took up the weapons, which he had struck from their hands, and handed to the captain and the junior lieutenant their blades.

"You, sir, must wait to see which you shall meet to kill, or to be killed by," he said to the first luff.

In silence they took their weapons, and, the giant raising his blade, as he stood on one side, calmly said:

"Now, senors, I am ready if you are, and you can cross over my sword."

Taking their positions in silence, they raised their blades and crossed them over that held out by the Giant Buccaneer.

"Are you ready?" he asked.

"Yes," came from the lips of both.

Instantly he lowered his blade and the combat was begun, and fiercely.

For a minute the two men struggled desperately for mastery, each one hopeful of averting the doom hanging over him.

On one side stood the giant, calmly looking on, while, his hands folded upon his sword-hilt, the other pirate officer watched the deadly work with an intense feeling of suspense and dread.

"Ha! I have him!" suddenly cried the pirate captain, exultantly, and he ran his sword through the heart of his officer.

With a grasping of his hands in the air, as though striving to clutch the life he saw slipping away from him, the man fell to the earth.

"Now I am ready, senor," said the captain, turning to his other officer.

"Do not hasten, senor, for you may need all your strength," remarked the giant, and he allowed a few moments to pass before he again took his stand and raised his sword.

"Cross above my weapon, senors!"

They obeyed, the lieutenant more nervous than his captain.

"Are you ready?"

"I am."

"Yes."

The answers came together.

"Then begin," and the giant dropped his blade.

As fiercely as before the combat began, the captain flushed with his former victory.

But he found in his adversary a more skillful swordsman than the other had been, and it made him cautious when he discovered that he could not at once find a weak spot in his guard.

For some minutes he kept up the hard struggle, and then discovered that, though his lieutenant was equal with the use of a blade, he was his inferior in endurance, and already began to fail in strength.

Realizing this, he pressed him the harder, while, with this knowledge also coming over him, the lieutenant became unnerved, and after a few more passes, became a victim to the already red-stained weapon of his superior.

"Now, Sir Slave, I come out the victor!" cried the pirate captain, exultantly.

"Yes, against your two officers; but you have another foe to meet," was the cool reply.

"Ha! do you mean that I have to face you?" cried the buccaneer, in alarm.

"No."

"Who then?"

"Death."

"But you said the victor over the other two was to be spared."

"Oh, no! only his fate was to be a little different from theirs."

"And what will be my fate?" almost groaned the now disheartened man.

"You can have your choice."

"Of what?"

"How you die."

"Must I die?"

"Yes."

"No! no! no!"

"Yes, the Witch so decrees it, and—"

"I will see her and beg for my life."

"It will be useless, as you are in my power."

"Alas!"

"You can have your choice of death, senor."

"Is there a choice when one has to die?" was the sad question.

"You shall judge for yourself, for you can either leap from this cliff, or—"

"Great God!" cried the doomed man, as he looked down into the deep waters with a visible shudder.

"Or," continued the giant, in his imperturbable way, "you can take your chances in a chase with those six bloodhounds."

In spite of himself, a cry broke from the lips of the pirate captain, and he said:

"Gladly will I take the leap, when such another doom awaits me as you suggest," and he moved a step nearer to the cliff, as though, utterly without hope, he intended to end his misery.

But the giant checked him with:

"One moment, senor."

"Well?"

"I observe that you wear a superb brooch of gems, a watch, and a magnificent stone upon your little finger."

"There is no need of your carrying such valuable articles to a deep-sea grave with you."

The pirate chief hesitated an instant, and then cried, with exultant tones, as he sprung toward the cliff:

"By Heaven! devil that you are, I will thwart you there!"

With this he gave the leap far out over the cliff, while from his lips broke a burst of mocking laughter.

With a bound the giant had sprung forward to seize him, his finger-ends just touching his shoulder, and then, unable to recover himself, he went headlong over the precipice, following his victim down into the dark rushing waters.

waters of the Mississippi river some weeks after the parting of the Sea Owl and yacht Lady Maud in the Gulf.

Upon her decks was a negro crew, and her masts, spars and sails showed that she had been under a hot fire.

The taffrail had also been splintered, and shot-marks were upon her bulwarks, too.

But the one at her helm carried nothing in his quiet face to show that there had been death and peril about him.

His face was less clouded than when the reader last beheld him ordering the execution of the pirate chief, Barton Keys, for the helmsman was Midshipman Brandt.

Now and then a shadow stole over his handsome, manly face, and he would glance down into the companionway as though the cause of trouble lay there.

As it grew nearer the sunset hour, he called out:

"Here, Woods, take the helm, while I go below."

The negro mate obeyed, and the midshipman passed down into the cabin.

There he beheld, seated upon a divan, her small foot beating the floor impatiently, none other than the Smuggler Queen, Rita.

Her face had lost its color, her eyes burned with an unnatural light, and her lips were as stern as though carved in stone.

She turned her blazing eyes upon the midshipman as he entered, but said nothing, while her hands twitched nervously.

"Lady, I have come for a last talk with you," said Irving Brandt, in a kindly tone.

"Oh, no! not a last talk, for some day you will beg me to spare you, boy, and I will be merciless!" she hissed forth.

"I have always found you so toward me; but I did not come to talk of the hatred you bear me, but to once more offer you freedom."

"Never!"

"You know that, pitying Chester Granger, and believing him not naturally bad at heart, I set him free when we were in Mobile, and it was to do this that I brought my negro crew with me on this cruise that others might have nothing to say."

"You were a fool to set him free."

"I may have been; but my intention was to free you both."

"I am not revengeful, but I did visit the Witch's Island hoping to find there those who had persecuted me; but, as you know, they had fled, and finding their smack floating capsized, they have doubtless gone to the bottom."

"But against you I feel no revenge."

"I only wish that you did," said the woman, bitterly.

"I know that the circumstances of birth made you what you are, and I pity you."

"And I curse your pity, boy," was the savage rejoinder.

"I wished to have you leave in Mobile, but you would not, and now I again say to you that I will set you free as soon as I reach an anchorage, for we are nearing the city, and I am ready to bear the consequences of my act."

"I will not accept pardon at your hands, Midshipman Brandt."

"You will be imprisoned."

"So be it."

"Perhaps for life."

"I care not," was the answer, with a grim smile.

"I am not anxious to feel that I have placed a woman in prison, and I wish you to leave the vessel and go your way as soon as I land you."

"Do you know what I would do?"

"No."

"Can you not guess?"

"It is a matter of too little interest to me, for me to care to guess."

"It is a matter of the deepest interest to you, for I would kill you."

"You have threatened that before."

"Boy, I have sworn it."

"I swore to kill you when I saw you kill my father, and Heaven knows I tried hard to keep my oath."

"I loved my father devotedly, but I idolized, worshiped, Barton Keys."

"And he whom I so loved you have hanged."

"I saw you place the noose about his neck, I heard you give the order to your negro crew to drag him into the air, and I saw him swinging there, betwixt the sea and sky; I beheld his death-agones, and—I fainted."

"But, boy, I vowed a fearful vow to some day kill you."

"Ay, and this very moment could I do it; but no, when you die, it shall be by torture, yes, a torture that will cause you to entreat me to put a quick end to your miseries, and I will revel in your groans of anguish."

"Oh, no! you shall not die a noble death, by a bullet from my pistol, or by my hand driving the steel to your heart."

"See, I have both weapons here, but I will not use them on you," and she drew from the folds of her dress a pistol and a jewel-hilted dirk.

But the midshipman did not flinch, as he gazed upon her, more in pity than in anger.

CHAPTER XX.

She had sprung to her feet in her excitement, and spoke with vehement rapidity, her eyes blazing the while, her lips quivering, and her form trembling.

Seemingly exhausted by her passion of hatred, she sunk back upon the seat, still glaring at him, while he said calmly:

"For your own sake I am sorry that you will not take the liberty I offer you."

"As you will not depart in peace, you will have to suffer."

"I will accept all the suffering, for none could be greater than to receive kindness and my freedom at your hands," was the bitter response.

"As you please, lady."

"We are in sight of the city, and I will send for the officers of the law to come on board and escort you to the *carcel*.

"But should you change your mind before I drop anchor, you are at liberty to do so; but after that you cannot."

"Boy, leave me," was the stern reply, and half an hour after the anchor was let fall upon the muddy bottom of the river, and a messenger was dispatched to the *carcel* for officers.

They soon arrived, and Rita, the Smuggler Queen, soon after found herself the inmate of the cell where her pirate husband had passed so many days and nights of wretchedness.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE COURIER'S TIDINGS.

LIKE wildfire the news of the capture of the Smuggler Queen spread through the city, for Bradford Carr, upon his arrival in the yacht, had dropped anchor by night, and turned the prisoners over to the navy commandant, telling him of finding Irving Brandt, who would make his report upon his coming to the city, so that it was not known what good work had been done until the arrival of the midshipman.

He had, as soon as the Smuggler Queen was in the hand of the officers of the law, gone to the commandant of the naval forces and made his full report.

He had told of the wreck of the Vulture, and what followed, not even hiding the fact that he had set Chester Granger free, under the promise of a better life, for the sake of his kindred, who did not know that the young smuggler had gone so wholly to the bad.

The commandant heard all and said:

"Well, Brandt, you have done well, and I am not sorry that you hung the Sea Ghoul, while, as you did it not on a Government vessel, you cannot be censured for it."

"I am also glad you set Granger free, for I always liked that young man, and for the sake of his relatives, as you say, it was the best thing that could be done."

"But I am surprised that you should offer freedom to that fiend in petticoats."

"It was because she is a woman, sir."

"True, and the most vindictive, daring and wonderful woman I ever knew."

"It was the Smuggler Queen, I am sure, who planned the bold rescue of her husband, the Sea Ghoul, and now that you have ended his career, I will see that she goes in for life, where she can never harm you, as she will if she can get the chance."

"It is a hard lot, sir."

"She deserves it, and she shall get her deserts, I assure you; but it will be hard to keep her, for her beauty can fascinate as a snake, and she has the tongue of a Siren."

"But she'll get life-imprisonment, as she deserves."

"But I must thank you for so well doing that Mobile business I sent you on, and as it is permitted me to order you on any duty I see fit, I will allow you to take your yacht and become a coast-guard against smugglers, and on the lookout for pirates, while Captain Palafox—who you say is coming up the river behind you with the Sea Ghoul's schooner a prize—will run down, for you will have a rendezvous where you can meet him at stated times."

"I will give you a couple of middies as officers—"

"Can I have Midshipman Manly, sir?"

"Ah! Handsome Nat, as the lads call him?"

"Yes; and he will be a right bower for you in time of need."

"I will give him to you, and Midshipman Ned Varley, with, say, a crew of twenty seamen and half a dozen marines, and you can arm your yacht as you like."

"Now I will go and have a talk with my officers in regard to this daring Smuggler Queen, and will see you to-morrow."

"Dine with us to-morrow, will you not, sir?"

"With pleasure, Brandt, and my remembrances to your sister and father, not forgetting that splendid fellow, Carr, whom I wish we had in our navy."

With this, Irving Brandt took his leave and drove rapidly home, where the greeting he met with made his heart glad, particularly when there was one present, on a visit to Maud, whom he had ever liked with a feeling akin to love.

That one was a sunny-haired, blue-eyed beauty of fourteen, whose life had been a strange

romance, and it had been also strangely interwoven with the young middy's life.

The daughter of a man whom circumstances had separated from his young wife, and which had made him a mutineer from cruel treatment and afterward a pirate, she had been born upon the sea, for her mother had forsaken all to go with her husband, even to share his lawless life.

That loving mother had found a deep-sea grave, however, and the father had clung to his little baby girl, and reared her in his wild haunts, among the bayous of the Gulf coast.

Captured one day, he had been placed in irons, his little daughter with him; but one whom he had served well had set him free one night by lowering him, all in irons as he was, along with his little daughter, and setting them adrift.

Their fate would have been death, but for Irving Brandt, who, cruising about in his little sail-boat, had picked them up, and instead of taking the pirate to the officers of the law, sailed with them to their secret haunt.

It was through the boy, who remained his friend, that the outlaw chief saw the wrong he was doing his child, and sent her to New Orleans to receive an education.

Serving Irving in turn, and Maud, by the rescue of Bradford Carr from jail, where he was under sentence for the murder of Soule Ravelle, whom Barton Keys had killed, this same pirate chief, known as Palafox, the Sea Fox, had broken up his band, offered his services to Government to hunt down buccaneers, and thus became, through his many good deeds, a man respected by even those who had known him as once an outlaw himself.

And it was Myrtle, the daughter of the Sea Fox, that so gladdened the heart of the young midshipman.

After relating his adventures in a modest way, Irving said:

"Myrtle, your father will soon be here, for I passed him at the mouth of the river, and with a prize in tow."

"Oh! I am so glad whenever my dear father can do aught to remove the shadow of the past from off his life," said Myrtle, feelingly.

"And what is the prize, Irving?" asked Bradford Carr.

"The one he went after, of course, for that is the way with the captain."

"The Sea Ghoul schooner that was cut out the night of her chief's escape?" cried the colonel.

"Yes, sir; he run her down, drove her inshore, and after a hot fire the pirate crew deserted the craft, going ashore in their boats, and he captured her."

"Well, this is joyous news indeed; and now, father, we can return to our dear old plantation home," said Maud, while she added:

"And you go with us, Myrtle, and Mr. Carr will become your tutor."

"Yes, and your husband, Maud, and won't that be jolly!" said the beautiful young girl, and her words crimsoned the face of Maud Brandt.

But so it was arranged, that Bradford Carr and Maud should be quietly married, and Irving, getting a short leave, should take them to the plantation in the yacht Lady Maud, for he was to go cruising in the captured Sea Owl, and his vessel, when fully fitted out, should come there for him under command of Middy Manly.

The following day, the Naval Commandant, Captain Arthur Nazro, came up to dinner, accompanied by Captain Palafox, and it was a happy gathering rendered still more so by the ceremony in the evening, which made Maud Brandt the wife of Bradford Carr.

After the congratulations were over, and the commandant and Captain Palafox were about to leave, Colonel Brandt said:

"Then you grant my son a couple of weeks' leave to take us home, Captain Nazro?"

"Willingly, and Midshipman Manly shall bring his cruiser there for him within that time, for it will take some time to get her in perfect trim."

"Then we sail to-morrow for the dear old home, and you go with us, Myrtle," said the beautiful bride.

But, as she spoke, there came the clatter of hoofs dashing up the avenue, and a courier sprung from his horse and handed a letter to Captain Nazro.

One glance at its contents, and he said, excitedly:

"Great God! the Smuggler Queen has escaped!"

CHAPTER XXII.

A SWIM FOR LIFE.

WHEN the Giant Buccaneer followed the pirate captain so quickly over the cliff, it was certainly an unnerving surprise to him.

He knew, when he took his victim to the cliff, that at that hour the tide set strong on the point, and, rebounding, went off seaward like a mill-race.

He had often thrown logs over, and watched how irresistibly they were borne out to sea, and once, in his skiff, he had barely managed to escape being carried off by exerting all his strength at the oars.

So certain had he been of catching the pirate by the shoulder, that, failing to do so he had lost his balance and gone over, head-first, wheeling once or twice in the air as he went down.

The captain had made a spring far out from the cliff, and alighted feet first in the water; but, when the giant came to the surface, after a hard struggle, he could nowhere see his victim.

"He has sunk, curse him, and now it is for me to save myself—if I can," he muttered.

The tide had already swept him some distance away, and he at once set to work to stem it.

Fortunately he was dressed in his tight-fitting skeleton suit, and was therefore not retarded much by clothing.

He was a powerful man, even for his great size, and his endurance was remarkable.

Also, he was a superb swimmer, and, during his long stay on the island, he had sported in the waves for hours, and now it served him well.

Setting his eyes on a point below the cliff, where he knew he could pass through a reef, and make a landing, he began the struggle for it.

Off the point of the cliff there was no reef to guard the island, but here and there rocks that reared their heads above the waters, lashing them to foam.

He was now over a cable's-length from the point, and sweeping seaward at a tremendous pace, while the point he was to reach was a quarter of a mile distant, and he knew it would take his entire strength to get there.

Of his victim he did not think, believing that he, incumbered by his clothes, had gone straight to the bottom, pressed down by the rushing tide.

With a long, strong, telling stroke, he began his swim, and kept them up without an instant's check.

For a long time, perhaps a quarter of an hour, but what seemed far longer to him, he could not tell whether he had gained a foot, or lost.

But, fixing his eyes upon a rock, he determined to keep to the starboard of it, to get more out of the tide, and thus see whether he was losing way or not.

Thus another quarter of an hour passed, and he saw with joy that he was level with the rock, but he had not made more than thirty paces.

Again he took a rock for his beacon and headed for it.

Nearer and nearer he drew to it, but, oh! so slowly, and he felt that the struggle was telling upon him fearfully.

Nearer and nearer, until he saw that he could not pass it, and, getting into its wake, where it broke the force of the tide, he managed to reach it with a giant effort.

He was well-nigh exhausted; but standing up to his knees in water, and clinging to the jagged ends, he rested.

Then, too, he searched for another beacon ahead.

Off to the right, a good cable's length away, he beheld another rock.

It was more under the lee of the island, which broke the force of the tide, and was about where the inlet through the reef was.

After a long rest he again sprung into the seething waters and began his second struggle.

Until he was warmed up to his work he made no progress, but then he began to make headway once more.

Again he exerted his whole strength, and several times felt like giving up the struggle as useless; but once more he made a grand effort and clutched the rock, utterly prostrated.

From there to the island-shore was comparatively easy work; but it was a long time before he could make up his mind to risk it.

He thought of staying on the rock until morning, in the hope of being seen by the Witch or the others, but then against this was the fact that the tide was still rising, and must sweep him off, while he was being chilled through.

Then the Witch would perhaps be glad to lose him, so that her son, Perdido, might become the captain of the schooner.

Nerved with this thought, after all he had suffered, he sprung into the water once more, and struck out for the shore.

But it was hard even then, protected as he was by the point, for him to make easy headway, and he was barely able to reach the sandy beach, when staggering out he fell from sheer exhaustion.

A long time he lay there, and then rising, he sought the cliff by a path he knew well, and hurled the bodies of the two dead pirate officers over, in a vicious kind of way, as a salve to his sufferings.

Then he started for the ravine, and approaching it by the beach, heard voices in the pathway leading to the sea.

Creeping through the thicket of pines, he reached a spot where he could see them in the starlight, and also hear them.

What they said was by no means pleasant for him to hear.

The Giant Buccaneer.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PLOTS.

WHAT the starlight revealed to the giant as he crouched in the thicket were, as I have said, two persons.

The one was the old Witch, in all her hideousness, and the other her hopeful son, in his double-sided dress.

"You sent for me, mother?" Perdido asked, for he had joined the Witch just as the giant reached his hiding-place, while the footsteps of some one going on up the ravine were heard, and to whom the woman had been talking.

"Yes; I had one of the men go on board to ask you to come to me, for I have news for you."

"And what can it be?"

"About the slave."

"The giant?"

"Yes."

"What of him?"

"He attempted to get rid of those three officers?"

"Yes."

"And take command?"

"So I know."

"He hinted that his plan was to carry them to the cliff on the east end of the island, and make them kill each other."

"Was he afraid of the work?"

"Oh, no; he is afraid of nothing; but, as he was gone so long, I got anxious about him."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; and my anxiety increased when the hounds came back alone."

"Ah! what did you do?"

"I called the dogs, but they would not follow me, for you know he looks after them."

"You should not let him take them from you."

"I was doubtless wrong; but I went to the prison caves and found all silent."

"They had left there?"

"Yes."

"And then what did you do, Mother Witch?"

"I climbed up to the plateau and went to the cliff."

"Were they there?"

"Two were."

"Which two?"

"The lieutenants."

"And the captain?"

"Was not to be seen."

"And the giant?"

"Was nowhere to be found."

"Ha! this looks strange; but what did you do then?"

"I came back to the ravine where the seamen are at work getting the booty down to the beach."

"Could they tell nothing of them?"

"Nothing."

"This is very strange."

"So I thought; but, Perdido, I have solved the mystery."

"How, mother?"

"I went back to the cliff, and I found there the weapons of the three pirates, and also the slave's long sword."

"I had a lantern with me, and I saw that the edge of the cliff had been broken, as by a foot, or a body, and I knew that those other two had gone over."

"What! can it be so?"

"Yes, the slave doubtless intended to throw the pirate captain over, and was dragged over himself, in some way."

"But he can swim ashore."

"No, indeed, for that whirlpool under the cliff no man could live in."

"Then you believe they are both lost?"

"I know it."

"And what will you do, mother?"

"My son, you must step into the slave's shoes, and command the schooner."

"Ah, mother!"

"It is true, and I am glad that he is dead, for he was becoming too bold, and we would have been under his rule."

"Now I will have you put me on the Death Island, and you can turn buccaneer, capturing only rich prizes, while I will use my false beacons to lure vessels ashore, and the booty they bring, you can dispose of, and we can get vast riches."

"Mother, I will be guided by you in all things."

"I do not like the slave, and I am glad to get rid of him, for I fear him."

"And so do I, and, should he turn up, I think we had best remove him from our way, as soon as it is safe to do so."

"So I think," answered Perdido.

"Now return to the schooner, for, under the circumstances of our seizing her, it is best that the men should have you on board to awe them."

"And you?"

"Will see that the work goes on here, so that we can sail before noon, as I am in dread all the time of that accursed boy coming back."

"The midshipman?"

"Yes."

"You think he will come?"

"I know that he will."

"But do you believe that he has escaped in that craft?"

"Oh, yes, he will not be drowned, for he is one to cling on, and to-morrow we will leave in the schooner, and then capsize the smack and anchor her off some distance, so as to give the impression that we have gone under."

"A good idea, mother."

"Yes, and all shall work to our welfare, I pledge you, and, once we have gained riches, I have a duty for you to perform, Perdido."

"You have but to name it, mother."

"I know that, I feel that, boy, but, disfigured as I am, I dare not show my face before the world, and you must help me in what I ask."

"I will, so tell me what it is?"

"Have you forgotten that you had a father?"

"I do not remember him, mother, though you told me he deserted us."

"Yes, he sought his own safety, and left you and I to die amid savages upon a South Sea island."

"You were afterward taken from me, by a vessel, and I was left alone."

"At last I left the hated spot, to look up my boy and my husband."

"You have I found, Perdido, and the hatred in my heart tells me that I will yet stand face to face with your father."

"You think he still lives?"

"I know it, for the Fates would not let him die, except through the vengeance of the wife he so wronged, or by the hand of his son."

"That shall be your duty, to hunt down your father, my husband, and bring upon him full revenge for the past."

"I have gold, and jewels, and booty that will bring more; but we must hoard up for some time yet, and then we can live in luxury, and spend money freely to gain our ends."

"But return to the schooner, for it is best, and I will see that all goes well on shore."

With this the Witch and her son parted, while the giant came forth from his hiding-place, and standing on the spot they had just left, muttered:

"They think me dead, do they, and if I am not, that it will be well to get rid of me."

"So be it, let them work to that end, but warned as I am, I can thwart them."

"Now to surprise and disappoint Witch Zulah," and he strode slowly on up the ravine toward her cavern.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE SKELETON BUCCANEER SETS SAIL.

FILLED with delight, in the hope that her slave was dead, and her plotting for the future, the Witch was working hard in her cavern, tying up her ghastly paraphernalia for transportation on board the schooner.

It was some hours after midnight, but she seemed untiring, and the weird surroundings caused the pirate seamen to work with the same energy, they being anxious to get away.

Piles of booty had been carried to the seashore, and boats from the schooner were transferring it to the hold.

The ghastly array of bones and skulls the men seemed to shrink from, but the Witch told them that they were to go too.

"You have done well, Witch Zulah."

At the deep tones of the giant the Witch started, and a cry broke from her lips.

She saw all her hopes dashed to the ground by the return of one she hoped was dead.

But she controlled her feeling and said:

"Yes, I do not wish to delay here, as that boy may return at any moment."

"True, it is better for us to depart as soon as we can."

"Is all working well?"

"Yes."

"No trouble with the crew?"

"None, for they would not dare."

"I judge not."

"What of the three officers?"

"They are safe."

"How do you mean, slave?"

"Pardon me, Witch, I do not now bear the name of slave."

"I am Captain English, the Giant Buccaneer, and so I shall expect you to remember."

"You cannot win success without my aid."

"True, nor can you do without me, so let one aid the other for the present."

"We cannot do otherwise; but where are the officers you went to see?"

"I told you that they were safe."

"And what does that mean?"

"That they are at the bottom of the sea."

"You killed them, then?"

"Oh, no, they killed each other."

"They are not where the pirate crew can find them, should they roam the island in the morning?"

"No, but I will now help you, for I do not wish to be longer on this island than need be?"

"Nor I, for I fear the boy."

"He is one to fear; but the noon shall see us set sail," and with this the giant set to work with a will, and sending on board the schooner

for an additional force of men, it was early in the afternoon when all was in readiness to depart.

The crew of the schooner looked with awed interest upon the three strange beings that had so mysteriously taken possession of their vessel; but not for one instant did they think of rebelling against the power of the Witch, or the huge captain she had placed over them.

Some of them asked regarding their officers; but the Witch said that they had met their doom, and that their fate had saved the schooner.

Towing the smack out from the island some distance, the giant captain had her capsized with her sails up, and thus left her drifting upon the sea.

Then the schooner set sail from the fatal island and went on her way to the Death Isle, the spot chosen by the Witch for her future abode.

A sail of twenty-four hours, with a light breeze, brought them in sight of the island, a spot noted for the many wrecks that it had caused, from the days of richly-laden Spanish galleons, down to the time of which I write.

It was a reef-encircled isle, with an entrance here and there, which only a skilled pilot could carry a vessel through, and into its center almost penetrated a lagoon, the banks of which were heavily timbered, thereby affording a secure hiding-place for a small craft.

The Giant Buccaneer seemed to know the spot well, and, as the schooner passed slowly around it, he pointed out to the Witch and Perdido the strong points in its favor.

No one would have suspected the presence of the lagoon, from the view obtained of the island while passing, and so dangerous was the entrance through the channel, that the Giant Buccaneer got the boats out and towed in.

Once she had set foot upon the land, the Witch said that she preferred it to the Haunted Island, and she at once selected her place of abode, and the entire crew of the schooner were set to work to fix up her home in as appalling a manner as her brain could suggest.

A group of trees on one end were selected as the best spot for the display of a false beacon, to lure ships at a loss of their course, and the glass and lanterns were at once put up.

Anxious to secure a larger crew as soon as possible, and begin his red work upon the sea, the Giant Buccaneer hurried the men in their labors for the Witch, and, during the several days' stop at the island, having studied the channel well, he took the helm and stood out of the lagoon.

Perdido accompanied him, as his first luff, and the old Witch stood waving them a farewell, she having been left alone on the island.

The crew found their new commander a man who was a perfect sailor, stern, yet not unkind, and one who would be obeyed, and they were not sorry of the change, especially, when taking charge, he generously gave to them one-half of the treasure found on board, and which had belonged to his unfortunate predecessor, or rather had been stolen by him.

As the island grew dim in the distance, the lookout hailed the deck, and reported a sail in sight.

All was at once excitement on board, and, as the stranger drew nearer the pirate officer, who had escaped the doom of his brother officers, said:

"I know the craft, it is the Sea Owl, a lugger yacht commanded by the Lady Captain who is also known as the Smuggler Queen."

"Whatever it is, I'll give chase, for every craft afloat is my game," was the stern response of the Giant Buccaneer, and he at once gave orders to set more sail and put the schooner on a course that would head off the stranger.

As the two vessels neared each other, the little craft showed no anxiety at the presence of the schooner, but held on its way, evidently laying its course for the Belize.

But after awhile, seeing that the pirate was gaining and was already within range, more sail was set on the lugger, and she went along over the waters at a lively pace.

"He has a small crew, and they are negroes," said the junior pirate officer.

"Yes, it is the craft you think, senor, for I know her, too," said Perdido; and then he added:

"She was captured by that middy that was wrecked on the Vulture with me, and who made his escape in the coffin boat."

"Do you make out who are standing upon her quarter-deck, Captain English?"

"Yes; and, by Heaven! I see the boy who escaped from us."

"He stands on deck near the negro helmsman, and the crew are also black."

"You are right, Senor Perdido, she is gaining, and I'll see what the guns will do."

"Clear those bow-guns there for action!"

The deep tones of their huge captain caused the crew to spring to their work, and the bow-guns were soon ready.

"All ready, sir!" called out the gunner.

"Fire a solid shot over her, as a hint to come to!"

This was done, but it had no effect upon the chase other than to dash the spray upon her decks, for the shot struck right astern of her, and, with a *ricochet*, went above her decks.

"He pays no attention to us."

"Give it to him again, sir," called out the Giant Buccaneer, and once again the gun was fired.

This time the shot cut through the sails, yet still the little craft held on.

"As I live, she is dropping us; so fire with both guns, and keep it up until she obeys our iron orders," shouted the Giant Buccaneer.

Both bow-guns now opened lively, and they were well-aimed, for the shots cut through the sails of the flying craft, and were also seen to splinter the bulwarks, decks and spars.

But the little vessel held on its way, and Irving Brandt could be plainly seen standing at the helm.

But he did not flinch at the hot fire of the schooner, and after awhile his black crew were seen to man his stern-guns and he began to hit back.

And thus the chase went on, the little vessel steadily gaining, and yet suffering from the fire of the schooner.

Finding that the yacht would not come to, even under the iron hail poured upon her, the Giant Buccaneer cried:

"Stand by those port guns, and, helmsman, luff sharp, and I'll give her a broadside!"

Then the schooner luffed sharp, and while her sails were fluttering, her whole broadside was poured upon the flying craft.

A yell broke from the pirate crew as they saw her stagger under the broadside, and then come to, while her flag fluttered down to the deck.

"By Heaven! but she is ours," cried the Giant Buccaneer.

"Yes, and I shall have my revenge upon that accursed boy," hissed Perdido through his shut teeth, while his eyes lighted up with a baleful glare at his anticipated vengeance upon the daring midshipman who had so thwarted him in his plot to get riches by robbing the Smuggler Queen.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE GIANT BUCCANEER BEGINS WORK.

THERE was one person on the Skeleton Flag, as the buccaneer schooner was called, which the giant had so cleverly taken possession of, who had been watching the flying yacht most attentively, and had his glass to his eye at the time that the broadside was poured upon her.

When, therefore, the Sea Owl was seen to luff up suddenly, after receiving the broadside of the schooner, and the Giant Buccaneer believed she had surrendered, and Perdido was congratulating himself upon gaining his revenge, the pirate lieutenant called out:

"She is off again!"

"What do you mean?" cried the Giant Buccaneer, turning his gaze upon the yacht.

"Your broadside killed the negro at the helm, and he luffed before it could be helped."

"Then a young man in uniform rushed to the tiller, and see, she is again flying."

"By the saints! but it is true."

"Give her the other broadside there—let her fall off, helmsman—steady! now let her have it! fire!"

The schooner's side seemed like a flame of fire, but her shots flew wide, and the yacht rushed on unhurt.

As the buccaneer had now lost considerable time in delivering his broadsides, and the Sea Owl had not been delayed half a minute, the capture of the little craft must depend upon her being crippled by the bow-guns of the Skeleton Flag.

But, with another negro at the helm, Irving was manning and aiming his stern-guns himself, and with such accuracy that he cut away a foretopmast of the schooner, and then her bowsprit.

"Curse that fellow! he handles his craft as well as a commodore ever did a line-of-battle ship," cried the Giant Buccaneer.

"And will escape us," said Perdido.

"Will? He has escaped, for we can do him no harm now."

"Well, another time I hope to meet him; but he is a plucky fellow, and I am glad he got off, for if I catch him, I'll let him go free, after robbing him."

"You may, Senor Captain; but I have a debt to settle with him," hissed Perdido.

"Then you will have to pay it elsewhere than on this vessel, Senor Perdido, for I command here, and I admire the young midshipman, from all I have seen of him, too much to see him come to bodily harm."

"But I shall head now for Lake Borgne, and run into a safe hiding-place."

"And then, captain, may I ask?"

"I shall visit the city, for I need more men, some equipments and to attend to a little private business, not to speak of the booty your mother wishes me to dispose of."

"By the way, do you know the city well?"

"I do, captain."

"Well, you can aid me, and perhaps take me to some one who will be a good man to make my agent for the disposal of booty?"

"I know just the man, Captain English."

"Then we will seek him."

"Pardon me, if I cannot accompany you, for there are circumstances that will render it unsafe for me to do so."

"To be frank with you, I once was in his employ."

"Ah! and set sail with his gold, leaving him the experience gained by your act."

"Oh, no! I took nothing from him; but there was a woman in the case, and I used my knowledge, gained in his service to further my ends, so would prefer not to meet him."

"As you please; but who is he?"

"One Don Rudolpho, known as a money-lender, and purchaser of gems."

"Where is he located?"

"On Bienville street."

"And a good inn, not too public, can you tell me of, where I can put up?"

"The Date Tree Inn,* on the corner of Toulouse and Dauphin street."

"I thank you," and the Giant Buccaneer wrote the address of the money-lender and the inn down.

Arriving in a secure hiding-place on the lakeshore, Captain English took a small boat and rowed to a fisherman's hamlet not far distant, and from thence went to the city.

Before leaving the vessel he had dressed himself neatly in the garb of a coast planter, for he well knew that he attracted attention from his great size.

Making his way to the city, he put up at the Date Tree Inn, securing most comfortable rooms, for his tastes were luxurious, and it had been long since he had known what luxury was.

Having become settled, as it were, in his new quarters, he sallied forth to seek Chartres street, on which dwelt Don Rudolpho, the money-lender.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE MONEY-LENDER AND THE SMUGGLER.

THE news brought by the messenger to Commandant Nazro, when he was at the Brandt villa, to the effect that Rita, the Smuggler Queen had escaped, was certainly of a most startling character.

It sent the naval commandant, Captain Palafax, and Irving Brandt to the city in haste, for if the Smuggler Queen was free it meant mischief.

Some hours after, Irving Brandt returned. The family were waiting up for him.

"Well, Irving, my son, what news do you bring?" asked Colonel Brandt.

"The keeper of the *carcel*, sir, could tell us little of anything more than that the woman had escaped."

"He was not at the jail at the time, and was too excited to speak rationally, for he knew that he would lose his place."

"But, father, I think we better sail for the plantation to-morrow."

"As you deem best my son."

And so it was decided, and Irving retired to his room, happy in the thought that he would have those he loved beyond the woman's revengeful reach, for he did not believe that she would follow them there, and be contented with striking a revengeful blow only at him, as she had threatened.

But to explain the escape of the Lady Captain, so soon'after incarceration, I must ask the reader to accompany me to the *levee*, upon the evening of the arrival of the yacht on board of which the Smuggler Queen was brought a prisoner to the city.

Standing under the shadow of a large live-oak tree, watching the approaching vessel, was a man apparently bent with years, although there seemed about him a certain military air, for he wore a cloak, carried a gold-headed cane, and his eyes had a flash in them that seemed to belie his gray hair and beard.

"There comes the yacht," he muttered, as the Sea Owl hove in sight, coming up the river in the early twilight.

Waiting until he saw her drop anchor, he beheld a negro depart in haste, evidently bearing some important message.

Without the slightest sign of impatience, he kept his stand, now shielded by the darkness, and saw a vehicle drive up to the landing, and a boat put off with several men to the Sea Owl.

Then he beheld the boat leave the craft to come shoreward; he walked slowly along, arriving opposite the vehicle just as three men and a woman landed.

"It is Rita," muttered the old man, and he

walked briskly away until he caught a passing carriage that was empty, and he called to the driver, slipped a piece of gold into his hand and said:

"Keep that vehicle in sight."

This the coachman did, and when the party were set down in the city *carcel*, the old man dismissed his driver, and wended his way in the direction of Chartres street.

Arriving at a door over which hung a sign, with the name thereon of

"RUDOLPHO, MONEY-LENDER,"

he entered.

A bright-looking youth greeted him, and asked how he could serve him.

"I wish to see Don Rudolpho, please."

The youth disappeared in an inner room, and soon returned with the information that the Don would see him.

Entering the private room of the money-lender, the old man saw that personage before him.

"Well, senor, in what can I serve you, for I see that we are strangers, though my boy Bono mistook you for one of my old friends?" said the Don, not unpleasantly.

"I am an old friend, Don Rudolpho, for I am Chester Granger," was the reply.

"By Jupiter! you are well made up, Granger."

"Give me your hand in greeting, for it has been some time since we last met."

"Not since you recommended me as an officer to the Smuggler Queen, for which I thank you, Don Rudolpho, and I have tried to do my duty."

"No doubt of that, Granger, for you are such a deuced good fellow, I am always sorry when I think you have gone crooked."

"Thank you, and it is the regret of my life that I did so; but, having dishonored my name, I can but remain as I am."

"But the Lady Rita?"

"Alas! she is in trouble."

"Ah! again, when I believed all well with her, after her successful flight with her husband."

"She escaped all right with him; but he has come to grief."

"The Sea Ghoul again a prisoner?" cried the money-lender.

"Worse."

"Great God! can it be that—"

"He is dead."

It was upon the lips of the money-lender to fervently say:

"Thank God!"

But he restrained himself just in time, and said instead:

"Can this be possible?"

"It is."

"You know this?"

"I saw him die."

"Killed in a sea-chase, I suppose?"

"No, Don Rudolpho, Captain Keys died with a rope around his neck."

The money-lender was on his feet, while he cried:

"Hanged?"

"Yes."

"By whom?"

"Irving Brandt, the midshipman."

"This is startling news you tell me, Senor Granger; but his beautiful widow, the Lady Captain?"

"Went to the *carcel* a few minutes ago."

Don Rudolpho shuddered, and he was visibly affected.

He loved Rita, the Smuggler Queen, in his way, with all his heart, and though he was glad to hear that her husband was dead, no matter how, he was deeply pained to feel that she was a sufferer.

In his keeping he had a small bag of precious stones belonging to the dead pirate.

Had this secret died with Barton Keys so that they would be his, or was it known to others?

These thoughts of gain crowded through his brain in spite of his distress for Rita.

Then he said calmly:

"Tell me of all this, Granger."

In a few words Chester Granger made known to him how bitterly cruel had the Smuggler Queen been to the midshipman, her leaving him in the sea to swim to the Witch's Island as his only safety, and then finding him adrift on the Gulf in his coffin craft.

The sighting, chase, and the "catching of a Tartar," in the Brandt yacht, he made known, with the speedy hanging of the Sea Ghoul by the midshipman.

"But how did you escape, senor?" almost suspiciously asked the money-lender.

"Midshipman Brandt took his craft and negro crew, with Lady Rita and myself as prisoners, to go to Mobile on some business that called him there."

"The other prisoners were sent to the city with Mr. Carr, and I then knew why he had thus taken the Queen and myself."

"And why was it?"

"He did not wish to see me hanged, for the sake of the olden times, and he did not wish to deliver a woman over to the law for punishment."

"The boy has a heart."

* Still standing, though under another name.

—THE AUTHOR.

"A noble one indeed."

"And the result, senor?"

"He set me free, even offering me gold, in Mobile, and tried to give the Smuggler Queen her pardon."

"Tried to?"

"Yes, for she would not accept it."

"Do you mean it?"

"Yes, she refused to leave the vessel, and forced him to bring her here."

"And why was this?" asked Don Rudolpho, in surprise.

"She had seen him kill her father, though it was in a combat, and hang her husband, and she would accept no favor at his hands."

"This is strange."

"You know her, and that she is as firm as iron, so I left, and she came on here."

"Ha! is she here now?"

"She is."

"And where?"

"In the city carcel."

"My God!"

"I took a lake craft over, and arrived sooner than did the yacht, which got in to-night."

"And you saw her land?"

"I did, and drive to the carcel."

"This is fearful, for the poor girl must suffer greatly."

"She certainly does, yet will not show it."

"Her father and her husband are both dead, and she loved the one with all her heart, and idolized the other."

"Now she is herself in prison, and a life-sentence will be her fate if—"

"If what, Senor Granger?"

"If we do not rescue her."

"We will do it," said the money-lender, earnestly.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE RIVALS.

WHAT he said to Chester Granger regarding the rescue of the Smuggler Queen, the money-lender meant.

He was glad to be able to make a strong point in his favor with Rita by being her rescuer.

Of course he expected the smuggler lieutenant to serve under him in the matter.

He was in love with the strange and beautiful woman, as I have said, and could be save her from a life-long imprisonment, he would do all in his power to win her by kindness afterward.

He had sought the removal of her husband from his path more than once; but she did not know that, and alone in the world she must cling to the one who served her best.

So he thought, as he sat in silence after his words that he intended to save her.

But the brain of Chester Granger was busy, too.

He also loved the Lady Captain, and with a passion little less than what she had felt for her husband.

Barton Keys had been his professed friend, and yet he it was who had ruined him.

True, he had had his revenge in betraying Barton Keys to Bradford Carr; but the luck of the pirate had so well served him that he had escaped, and when the two had again met, the one was on the deck of his pirate schooner, the other a lieutenant on the fleet lugger of the Lady Captain.

Then and there the Sea Ghoul, having the power, would have avenged himself upon the man who had betrayed him, but his wife protected her lieutenant, and a nominal friendship had been patched up between them.

Loving Rita, Chester Granger had yet helped her to rescue her husband from prison.

He had told her of his love, too, and she had promised him, if the Sea Ghoul died, and he aided her more, that she would become his wife.

Thus matters stood at the time of the capture of the Smuggler Queen.

Neither the money-lender or the smuggler lieutenant could fathom the thoughts of each other, and little did either dream that they were rivals.

"It was my firm determination to rescue her, and that is why I came to New Orleans, for she has been too kind to me for me to allow her to be sent for life behind iron bars," remarked the smuggler lieutenant, after the two had sat in silence for some time.

"Have you thought of a plan?" asked Don Rudolpho.

"Of a hundred, yet hardly one that is feasible."

"Let me hear of one, for instance?"

"Well, while a prisoner on the yacht, I came across a piece of blank parchment, with the stamp and seal of the navy commandant upon it, and this I took off of the table, from a number of papers which Midshipman Brandt had taken from an oilskin wallet and placed there, while he went on deck to get a look at some sail in sight."

"That blank may be of use."

"So I thought, though I hated to take it from one who was treating me so well."

"Bah! a man in your calling, Lieutenant Granger, should never have a conscience."

"It is that which troubles me, for I cannot get rid of certain scruples."

"Well, to the paper?"

"I have it here."

"And your idea of using it?"

"That it might be made useful in getting the Smuggler Queen out of the carcel, if she was placed there."

"It can be."

"You see how?"

"Not exactly, but I will think up a plan of using it."

"I had thought," continued Chester Granger, slowly, "that it might be used in this way."

"I am listening, senor."

"A number of marines, under an officer, bearing this blank, filled up with an order for the Smuggler Queen to be sent immediately to the guard ship, might serve well."

"But the officer and marines would have to be bribed heavily."

"Oh, no, for I mean your men to represent them."

"Ah! that is a grand idea, and I will carry it out."

"The sooner the better."

"Of course, Senor Granger."

"And some arrangement must be made to get the Smuggler Queen off after her escape."

"Certainly; have you thought of how?"

"You know her old craft the Sea Owl is in port, and the Lady Maud yacht lies in the lake at anchor."

"Yes."

"It would be easier to board the yacht and run her off, where all is open sailing, than the Sea Owl here in the river."

"True."

"Well, I will see to that; but I must have men."

"I can get those for you, I think; but just now I have a large crew off under a captain, who went on a special duty for me; but the news you bring me of the death of the Sea Ghoul and capture of his wife, proves that my plans miscarried— Well, Bono, what is it?" and the money-lender turned to the boy who just then entered.

"The Senor Monte to see you, senor."

"Ha! he back again?"

"Say to him I will see him soon; but you were saying, Senor Granger—"

"We were speaking of procuring a crew for the yacht."

"Ah, yes; that I will do, and I am sure it can be done; but no time must be lost."

"No; what we do, we must do promptly, Senor Rudolpho."

"And how many men will you need?"

"A score of men."

"So many?"

"It will be well to have enough to defend the craft."

"Certainly; but what will you do after the Lady Captain escapes?"

"She will be the judge as to that; but I hope she will be content to relinquish the wild and perilous life she leads."

"And you, senor?"

"I will also gladly give it up and try to live more honestly."

"Perhaps also try to win the heart of the pirate's lovely widow for your own bride?" and Don Rudolpho smiled blandly.

"Would to God I could," was the energetic rejoinder of the young smuggler.

"Aha! I see something to keep my eye on, for he is my rival, and a dangerous one, for he is a score of years younger, though he does not look it, and he's handsome as a painting," muttered the money-lender.

But aloud he said:

"It would be a good thing, senor, if you could win her love, and thus take her from the wild life she leads."

"It would, indeed."

"My interest in her is on account of the deep friendship I have held for her husband since first knowing him and I will spend my gold freely to rescue her."

"Then we will adopt my plan, you think?"

"I certainly can see none better."

"And I will go and look over the Lady Maud at her anchorage, and then arrange all to be ready for to-morrow night."

"Yes; do so."

"And where will I meet your men?"

"The crew?"

"No, the pretended officer and marines who are to carry out my plan of rescue?"

Don Rudolpho was thoughtful a moment and then said:

"I'll tell you how I'll fix that."

"You will meet the crew at any given point on the lake-shore you think best and make known to me, so that I can have them report to you."

"With them you are to seize the yacht and sail through the Rigoletts to another anchorage along the coast where it is the shortest cut across to the river, and I will have the rescue party ready, with vehicles, awaiting them, and a large boat on the river."

"As soon as she is free, they will drive to the river, take the boat and row up to the point nearest where they can meet you."

"This is a good plan; but to make that distance in the yacht, I should seize her to-night."

"Yes."

"But can I do so?"

"If you get the crew."

"And can they be secured?"

"Yes, I think so; but where are you stopping?"

"At the Date Tree Inn."

"Ah, yes, and as—"

"George Chester, Alabama planter."

"I see, and I will communicate with you there in a couple of hours, so you had better at once take horse and ride out to the lake and get the locality of the yacht's anchorage, and—"

"That I know, for I came from Mobile here in a coaster that anchored near her."

"The very thing, so you can go out with your men, and soon seize the yacht and run her off."

"I will call for you, as soon as I have secured your crew, Senor Granger."

The smuggler lieutenant took this as an adios, and rising, departed, while Don Rudolpho muttered as the door closed upon him:

"Aha! you would steal from me my bride, would you, Chester Granger?"

"Oh, no! I have sworn to make that woman my wife, and by Heaven I will not allow any life to stand between the accomplishment of my ends—no, not a score of lives!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DON RUDOLPHO'S VISITORS.

AFTER Chester Granger, the smuggler lieutenant, had left the sanctum of the money-lender, the visitor whom Bono had announced as waiting to see the Don was ushered into the private room.

It was a man of fine presence, once a naval officer, but fallen from grace because a gambler, and had been the one selected by the money-lender to carry out his schemes against the Smuggler Queen.

But the handsome gambler had a haggard look not usual upon his face, in spite of his late losses and ups and downs of luck.

"Well, Monte, I am glad to see you back."

"You are welcome," said the money-lender, with the suggestion of a sneer in his tone.

"Whether I am welcome or not I care little, Rudolpho; but I am glad to get back," was the reply, as the gambler threw himself into a chair.

"You cut the schooner out all right?"

"Oh, yes."

"And escaped to sea in her?"

"Certainly."

"And captured the lugger I sent you after?"

"No."

"You did not capture the Queen Smuggler's craft?"

"I did not."

"Nor the Queen herself?"

"No."

"And then could not have hanged the Sea Ghoul, her husband, as I paid you to do?"

"No, but I came most infernally near being hanged myself."

"You don't mean it?"

"Fact; and you'll not catch me making a fool of myself going to sea under dark flags any more."

"I was a fool to do it this time; but my luck had been a little off of late, and I concluded to take your offer, which was a liberal one."

"I got out all right, but before I found the lugger of the Smuggler Queen I was found by the Sea Fox, who it seems gave immediate chase, and the infernal crew I had were too cowardly to fight, so I ran the craft in-shore, took to the boats, and was nearly drowned trying to find dry land enough in the swamps to get back to the city by."

"You had a hard time."

"I certainly did."

"And the crew?"

"Some were killed, others wounded by the Sea Fox, and the balance swam, waded and walked, and came in Indian canoes through the bayous, and here I am."

"You look pale."

"I feel pale."

"No, sir," was the emphatic response.

"Why not?"

"Because I do not put any more ropes about my neck if I can help it."

"Why, you live in nightly danger of death over your card-table."

"True; but there I am the equal of any man, and if he catches me off my guard he is welcome to kill me."

"If I catch him cheating, I shall certainly kill him."

"But, on the deck of a vessel which you have cut out and with a sable flag at your peak, which means hanging at the yard-arm if you are caught, it is no place for me."

"Well, I shall keep you in mind at any rate, Senor Monte; but this will square my indebtedness to you pecuniarily, while you have my thanks for what at least you tried to do," and the money-lender handed to the gambler a roll of bank-notes, and then bowed him to the door.

"One moment, Monte, please," he called out, as the gambler was disappearing,

"Well, Rudolpho?"

"I suppose you sent the crew to the regular lodging-house?"

"Yes, they sought their old places of abode, I believe."

"Thank you," and when the gambler had disappeared, the money-lender threw himself into his easy-chair and became lost in deep reverie.

At last he muttered:

"So that fellow Granger loves the fair Rita too?"

"Well, I cannot blame him, for she is very beautiful, and very lovable; but he shall not have her."

"No, no, I'll never give you up, sweet Rita."

"That is a splendid plan of Granger's though, and I'll fill in the blank to-morrow, after I have gotten a copy of the Naval Commandant's signature to copy it, and I'll use it too."

"It will be brought to a focus before they have time to suspect that it is known that the Smuggler Queen is in the *carcel*, and they will not be suspicious."

"But my friend Granger must have no hand in her rescue."

"On, no! I'll send him off on a wild-goose chase, and I must send him some men to aid him."

"Then he'll cut the yacht out, run to the spot I told him, and while he is waiting for the fair Rita to arrive up the river, she will be hidden away in my secret quarters upstairs, where she can remain until I get a chance to get her out of the city to some pleasant spot where she will wish to reside."

Thus was the money-lender musing when Bono again appeared.

"Ah, boy, I was just going to call you."

"There's a gentleman to see you, senor."

"Who is he?"

"Don't know, senor."

"A gentleman?"

"Has that look."

"Ever see him before?"

"No, senor."

"Sure?"

"Yes, senor, for he is not a man to forget, if once you saw him."

"Ah! some distinguished stranger who needs gold, doubtless."

"Well, I'll see him soon; but I wish you to take a note to Monsieur Miguel, of the Sailors' Haven Inn, when you have shown the gentleman in."

"Yes, senor."

The note was written ordering Monsieur Miguel to get together twenty picked men at once, and then to report to Chester Granger at the Date Tree Inn, the money-lender, however, giving the name by which the young smuggler was known at that fashionable tavern.

"Now, Bono, show the senor in," he said.

The youth disappeared, and a moment after there entered a man who had to bow his head to pass through the door.

"Good God! he is one to remember," muttered the money-lender, as the Giant Buccaneer advanced toward him.

CHAPTER XXIX.

DON RUDOLPHO AND THE GIANT.

THERE was that in the appearance of the man who entered his sanctum which caused

Don Rudolpho, the money-lender, to instantly arise to greet him.

The Don was by no means a small man, and he also possessed considerable dignity of mien, and held himself up with a certain majestic bearing.

But when he saw the Giant Buccaneer he felt like a pygmy before him.

He saw a man of giant stature, splendidly formed, with great broad shoulders, remarkably small hands and feet, and a well-poised head.

His bearing was haughty, though his smile was pleasant.

His face was full of intellect and conscious power, while he was dressed elegantly, yet in the free-and-easy style of a man whose attire troubled him but little.

He wore a superb diamond upon the little finger of his left hand, and in his scarf was a ruby of great brilliancy, while he carried a watch, with fob-chain set in precious stones.

Advancing toward the money-lender, he asked in his deep, yet strangely pleasant tones, when he chose they should be such:

"Do I address Don Rudolpho?"

"You do, senor; my name is Rudolpho, so pray be seated, and let me know if I can be of service to you," and the Don was glad to see his visitor sit down, so that the contrast in their height might not appear so great.

"You are a money-lender, I have heard?"

"I am, senor."

"For large sums?"

"For any sum you may need, senor, if you have the security to offer."

"I am not one to seek gold, unless I have the security to offer," was the cold reply.

"Pardon, senor; I did not mean to express myself so that you should understand me that you were; but I mean that I can advance any sum that you may desire."

"You are a judge of gems, then?"

"There is no one that is my superior in the city, senor, though I say so that shouldn't, perhaps."

"Give me the exact value of these," and the giant tossed a silk purse upon the table, which the money-lender picked up and emptied of its contents.

A mass of rare gems were exhibited, diamonds, rubies, emeralds, pearls and opals in great number.

One by one the money-lender glanced at them, making a few figures after each one had been valued, and then he said:

"You have here, senor, thirty thousand dollars."

"Face value?"

"Yes, just what I will give you for them, though of course they will bring me in a margin on that."

"Doubtless; but do you want them?"

"At that figure?"

"Yes."

"I will take them."

"And when pay for them?"

"To-night, now, if you wish."

"I have other goods to sell you, but of a different kind."

"I buy all there is a sale for, senor."

"Whether it was come by honestly or not?"

The money-lender looked up quickly, and then asked:

"Who sent you to me, senor?"

"One who has dealings with you."

"His name?"

"I am not at liberty to give it; but I need a good agent here to dispose of goods for me."

"What is the nature of your goods, senor?"

"Laces, silks, wines, jewels, and other articles of rare value."

"Come into the country without paying duty?"

"Perhaps."

"Smuggled in?"

"Perhaps a trifle stained in the importation."

"Ah! this looks as though you were—"

"What?" and the giant smiled straight into the face of the money-lender.

"You will not be angry, senor?"

"No."

"I may be wrong, but—"

"Quick, tell me what I may be?"

"A free rover."

"Why do you think so?"

"From your words only."

"I do not look like a corsair?"

"Oh, no! you look the planter; but appearances are often deceitful."

"True. Now one not knowing you would mistake you for an honest man."

"Senor!" and the money-lender's face flushed with anger.

"But I came not here to discuss your looks, Don Rudolpho."

"I am pleased with you, and your valuation of my gems proved to me that you did not wish to rob me of half their value. I am a sea rover, and—"

"I never heard of a buccaneer answering to your description."

"No, but you shall hear of me before long."

"Under what name, may I ask, senor?"

"You can be trusted?"

"I certainly should think that you feel so, as you came here to hold the converse you have with me."

"Why, I might have denounced you on your words."

The Giant Buccaneer smiled and answered:

"My dear sir, I have but to stretch forth my hand and seize you, and you are powerless—see!"

As he spoke, quick as a flash he grasped the money-lender, who saw that he was indeed powerless in that iron grip.

But as quickly he released him, and said with a smile:

"You see I could talk as I please without fear of your denouncing me."

"But come, I will trust you with my name, for it is my intention to intrust to your keeping a quantity of valuable plunder."

For the first time in his life Don Rudolpho was cowed.

He felt that he had met a man who could readily become his master, and the strength he possessed was something marvelous.

Instantly he determined to become upon friendly terms with the giant, and to keep so.

Smiling faintly, for the grip had alarmed him, he said:

"Selor, you will find as we become better acquainted, that I am to be fully trusted, and in all things."

"My name is Don Rudolpho, and men call me the money-lender."

"Now, may I ask, who it is that I have the honor of meeting?"

"My name, sir, is Captain English, but my men call me the Giant Buccaneer, while the craft I command is known as the Skeleton Flag."

"Ah! I have heard of such a craft."

"Doubtless; but she does not exactly suit me."

"There are others you might procure."

"Where are they?"

"Two of them are due here, I learned tonight, in a very short while, for one was cut out by a pirate crew, and the other set sail in chase and captured her."

"They are fleet?"

"The fastest keels in the Gulf, and I guess in other waters, too, senor."

"Cruisers?"

"One was built by the rover, now turned honest, known as Palafox, the Sea Fox."

"And the other?"

"Was the craft of the Sea Ghoul."

"It seems to me I have heard, years ago, of the former; but only lately of the Sea Ghoul."

"The fact is, I have not been where I could get news the past five years."

"Indeed! you are a stranger in these waters then?"

"By no means, only I have been living the life of an exile; but I have on my schooner, which lies hidden in a bayou on the lake-shore, a quantity of booty for you, and you can hope for more; but I desire you to see these two vessels you speak of, let me know all regarding them, and I will cut out the one I like the best."

"I'll do all in my power, senor; but where are you stopping?"

"At the Date Tree Inn."

"I know it well, and it is a fashionable resort; but what name do you register under?"

"That of Ethan English, an Alabama river planter."

"Then I will keep you informed, senor; but now let me give you the money you desire for the gems."

This was done, and the Giant Buccaneer

The Giant Buccaneer.

took his departure, leaving the money-lender again alone.

But only for a few moments, as a fourth visitor was announced.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE DON'S FOURTH VISITOR.

THE fourth visitor who was ushered into the room of the money-lender was a dark-faced man of thirty, whose appearance indicated that he had passed through a siege of severe illness.

He was dressed like a sailor, and looked like one who had walked the quarter-deck; sinking into the chair a short while before vacated by the Giant Buccaneer, with the air of one who was not only fatigued, but who felt that his business in coming could not be transacted within a short time, he gazed upon the Don.

"Well, senor, you do not seem to recall me?" he said, almost impatiently.

"Oh, yes; I never forget a face, Captain Merida," was the quiet response.

"Ah! you do know me then, though it has been years since we last met?"

"Yes, and then you were a smuggler."

"What are you now?"

"A pirate," was the cool response.

"Indeed! well that pays better, but there is more risk in it."

"True; but I may say that I was a pirate, for now I am without a ship or crew."

"That is bad for a pirate, senor."

"I have come for you to help me."

"I always aid the unfortunate, senor."

"Yes, so I know—if they have money."

"The laborer is worthy of his hire, senor," meekly responded the Don.

"Yes, and the money-lender of his money; but you shall have your way if you serve me well."

"You are not, then, a pirate without gold?"

"Does that look like it?" and the self-confessed outlaw threw a belt upon the table that was very heavy.

"If that only contains gold, it will not pay bounties for a crew for a smuggler."

The pirate smiled and said;

"It does not contain simply gold, senor, for there are gems in that belt that will bring a small fortune."

"And, by Heaven!" and the man shuddered, "I was nearly tempted to throw all these riches away a few nights ago."

"Why so?" asked the money-lender, with interest.

"To save my life."

"Riches save life, senor, I have found."

"Yes, and destroy it, too; but are you willing to aid me?"

"To get a vessel!"

"Yes."

"And a crew?"

"Yes."

"I am."

"How much money will you need?"

"Do you wish to purchase a craft or cut it out?"

"I purchase nothing but what I have to."

"Then I am to select a vessel for you, get your crew, fit a lugger out with stores, ammunition and other needed things, and dispatch it down the river to meet you when you run out?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'll do it."

"Name your sum."

"In these risky times crews have to be paid well, for you want only picked men."

"Of course."

"No men can be shipped who are not known, and who might prove traitor."

"That is true."

"I will have to charter a lugger, get stores, and meet other expenses."

"Well, how much do you want?"

"I want just twenty thousand pesos."

"You are high, but take your pay," and he opened the belt and rolled out some gems.

The money-lender calmly picked out the number to make the amount he had named, and wrote a receipt for them.

Then he said:

"But you did not tell me, Captain Merida, how you lost your vessel?"

"Through my accursed superstition," was the bitter reply.

"Ah, captain, do not call superstition accursed, for it is the religion of many of us,"

and the money-lender devoutly crossed himself.

"Well, religion or curse, I was led by it to ruin."

"Tell me how, for I am interested, I assure you."

"Well, I saw a Death Craft."

"A what?"

"A Death Craft."

"You saw it?"

"I did."

"Were you alone?"

"No; my entire crew saw it."

"I have heard of such crafts being seen among the islands."

"Yes; but we met this with no land in sight."

"It was the first sighted looking dark upon the waters."

"At night?"

"Of course."

"Well?"

"Then it suddenly lighted a weird lamp at mast-head and came toward us."

"Did you see her crew?"

"She had but one."

"It was a small craft, then?"

"Yes; a couple of tons, or so; but it was in the shape of a coffin, carried a red sail, with hideous emblems upon it."

"My God! this was a sight to see!"

"I should think so, and we put about and fled."

"Did it chase you?"

"No, it soon vanished; but we felt that we were doomed."

"That is the legend, I know."

"Yes; and I was doomed."

"You carried hideous emblems on your flag, too, I suppose?"

"Of course; for I am known as the Skeleton Buccaneer, and my schooner is called the Skeleton Flag."

The money-lender started, for the same thing almost the Giant Buccaneer had told him.

"Yes; I have heard of such a craft; but pray tell me your story."

"Well, it is said that a witch can only take off the spell cast by seeing a Death Craft at sea."

"So I have heard."

"And hence I sought the Witch's Isle."

"You did not go there?"

"I certainly did not, for it was death if I did, after seeing the Doom Craft, and I took the chances."

"With what result?"

"I saw again a death craft off the shore, but this time only a skiff, but with a skeleton-like form at the helm, as was in the other."

"We stood on, however, dropped anchor, and the skeleton helmsman hailed us, and the result was I went ashore with two officers and a boat's crew."

"I saw the Witch, and, oh! what a weird, wild being she was; for her face, hands and arms were tattooed most fearfully."

"I told her my errand, and the result was that she said she could save the schooner and crew, but the spell rested upon me and my two officers."

"We were then led to cave prisons, and left with savage bloodhounds as our guards."

"Then, soon after, we were taken to a cliff on the island overhanging the sea."

"Who carried you there?"

"The same helmsman who had come out to us in the skiff and hailed."

"The skeleton?"

"He was not a skeleton, though he looked it, for he was flesh and blood, and sinew, too, and more of it than I ever saw put up in human shape before."

"Why, what kind of a being was he?"

"A giant."

"Ah!"

"Yes, a man over seven feet in height, dressed in black, and yet with the outline of a skeleton painted upon him, while his face was a grinning skull."

"Oh, I saw hideous, appalling sights on that island of the Witch," and the pirate captain shuddered.

"I do not doubt it, if what you tell me is true."

"True! Every word is true, and more."

"But what then?"

"He told us that we were doomed, we three, and that one must fight the other to see which one would survive."

"Then he gave us our swords, and, by common consent, the three of us at once sprung upon him."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, but one sweep of a weapon, drawn from we knew not where, disarmed the three of us, and we were at his mercy."

"I can well believe that," said the money-lender, significantly.

"And then?"

"Oh, we had to fight, and I ran through the heart first one, and then the other of my officers."

"You are a fine swordsman, then?"

"Yes, I am so considered; but I was nothing to the Giant Skeleton."

"You fought him, then?"

"No, he told me I could have my choice of deaths, either to spring from the cliff into the sea, or to be run down by bloodhounds."

"There would be but one choice in my mind."

"So with me, and I was about to spring into the sea, when he said he wished the jewels I had on, and I determined to thwart him, and get that much revenge, so sprung from the cliff.

"He sprung forward to catch me, but missed his balance and went down into the raging waters, while I leaped far out."

"And he was drowned?"

"Yes, for I never saw him after his fall, and I believe few men could live in that wild tide."

"As for myself, I am like a fish in the water, and was swept seaward with fearful velocity, in spite of all I could do."

"Then it was I thought of throwing my belt of riches away; but just then my hand touched a hard object, and I discovered it to be a piece of wreck."

"I drew myself upon it, and was safe."

"But for four days I drifted upon it, before I was picked up, nearer dead than alive, by a vessel bound to this port."

"And your vessel and crew?"

"I know nothing about them; but I wish to get another craft and men, for I am not yet vanquished."

"And the doom?"

"Ah! I have met that, God knows, and survived it, in the sufferings I have known, for I faced my two officers, sprung from the cliff to almost certain death, and that has certainly cleared me from the spell cast upon me by the Death Craft."

"So I think, and I will do all in my power for you—Well, Bono?"

"The answer to your letter, senor, is that all will be attended to; but there is an old woman out here to see you, senor."

"A fifth visitor to-night."

"I wonder if she will prove as interesting as the other four?" muttered Don Rudolpho, the money-lender, as he escorted his fourth visitor to the door, and promised to see him again.

In that visitor the reader of course recognizes the victim of the Giant Buccaneer.

Now to see who the fifth caller that night on the money-lender will prove to be.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE DON'S FIFTH VISITOR.

The old woman, who was ushered by Bono into the room of the money-lender, had chosen a very late hour for a call, as it was now midnight.

But the boy, when closing the shop, found her at the door, and she would not take no for an answer.

Bono's shopmate had been frightened off by the old dame, and when he went to face her, he found her by no means a prepossessing individual.

She was tall, yet bent with seeming age, or rheumatism, and carried a stick in her hand, with which she had given the youth, who had mistaken her for a beggar, a severe rap over the shoulders.

"Do you come to make fun of old age, too, boy?" she asked Bono, who, with his shopmate in view still rubbing himself after the smarting blow, answered:

"Oh, no, ma'am, I came to see what your errand was."

"To see your master."

"The Don?"

"Do you serve two masters?"

"Oh no! I will tell him you are here."

"Just step inside and take this chair, for it is closing-time."

The woman obeyed, and as Bono passed his companion, he said in a whisper:

"Watch her, Tim."

"Plague her," muttered Tim.

Having made his announcement, and the money-lender expressing a willingness to see her, Bono ushered the old woman into the room.

"Well, my good woman, how can I serve you?" said the money-lender, eying her closely.

Without reply she took a seat, adjusted her spectacles and turned them upon the Don, who began to feel a trifle uneasy under her gaze.

As he met her face in full he saw that it was tattooed all over, and there was that about her wild appearance that filled him with a certain awe, for he remembered that his late visitor had said that the Witch he had sought to remove the spell of the Death Craft, was fearfully tattooed.

"Well, lady," he said, with extreme politeness, "how can Don Rudolpho serve you?"

"By answering certain questions that I ask," was the response.

"With pleasure."

"You lately had a visitor?"

"Yes."

"One who is known as the Giant Buccaneer?"

"Well, there was a large man, a giant in form I may say, who called upon me; but I do not know what his calling is."

"Bah! you cannot deceive me, for I read men's very souls."

"You know that the man was the Giant Buccaneer."

The Don shuddered, and felt sorry that he had admitted the old hag to an audience.

But he replied:

"I do now remember that he said men called him the Giant Buccaneer."

"You knew it before, Don Rudolpho; but I warn you not to attempt to deceive me."

"I do not wish to, lady."

"Bah! don't *lady* me, and don't lie to me, for I told you that the power has been given me to read men's souls."

"Do you know who I am?"

"No, lady—I mean senora."

"Hast thou ever heard of the Witch's Island?"

Again the Don shuddered, for he was most superstitious.

"Yes, I have heard of the Witch's Island."

"And of the Witch?"

"Oh, yes, often, and men speak most highly of her wonderful powers."

"Liar! men have had no reason to know of her powers."

"But in me you see Zulah, the Witch of Witch's Island."

Don Rudolpho was now white with fear, and he had to hold his teeth hard together to keep them from chattering, while the woman went on:

"If I touched you with my wand I could put a spell on you, that you could never get clear of, excepting by my will."

"But I have no desire to do so if you answer as I wish."

"I will answer all."

"See to it that you do, for I know your secrets, as I can show you if you doubt."

"You love the wife of the Sea Ghoul, you sought to kidnap her for yourself, you treated one who loved you well, and served you faithfully, with such unkindness that he was forced to fly from you—I refer to Perdido, your late confidential clerk, who went down to the bottom of the sea one night of storm, while flying from your cruelty."

"Oh! I know you well, Don Rudolpho, the money-lender."

The Don started at the name of Perdido, and then his thoughts became busy, while he continued to gaze upon the self-confessed Witch with almost a fixed stare.

"I acknowledge your power, la—I mean Mother Witch—and I am ready to serve you as you command," he said, in a low tone.

"All right, Don, see that you do," and then the woman continued:

"What know you of the Giant Buccaneer?"

"Only what he told me."

"He wants a new vessel?"

"Yes."

"And a larger crew?"

"Yes."

"You are to find the one and ship the others for him?"

"I am."

"He had riches with him when he came here?"

"Yes."

"And promises to send you booty, and deliver it to you as he took prizes?"

"Yes."

"Said he nothing of the Witch of Death Island?"

"Nothing; nor did I ever hear of a Witch on Death Island."

"Ah! well, you will hear of one there."

"I suppose so, as you say so, Mother Witch."

"Are you afraid of the Giant Buccaneer?"

"He is a desperate man."

"Yes; but poison will kill the largest human beings, as you know, Don."

The Don shuddered.

"You know it, for you remember how you once made a boy open a package that had poison-powder in it, intended for you, and he died in this very chair that I sit in."

"You carried his body off to the river one night and threw it in."

Don Rudolpho was livid, for he found now that a secret he believed known only to himself was held by another.

But he made no response, and still sat eying the Witch in that strange, staring way with which he had regarded her for the past few minutes.

"I wish you to have the Giant Buccaneer come here, and you are to poison him."

"What he brings in riches about him are yours, for the work; but his vessel and crew need not interest you, for I will look after them."

"Doubtless you will, Perdido!"

"Move one inch and I will kill you!" cried the money-lender, and he leveled a pistol full in the face of the pretended Witch, in whom his keen eyes had detected at last none other than his former confidential clerk, Perdido.

CHAPTER XXXII.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

To say that the one who had pretended to be the Witch of Death Island was taken aback by the sudden act of the money-lender, would be to put it mildly, for the start and tremor showed that the accusation had struck home.

The Don was a close reader of human nature.

He had studied faces and forms, yes, and hands even, while the many disguises he had been forced to wear himself made him suspicious that every one he met he did not know otherwise was under a disguise.

From the first he had believed his visitor to be a woman.

Then he had noticed the hands.

They were not tattooed, as the pirate captain had intimated, and he observed a peculiar scar on one which he thought he had seen before.

It was in the shape of a horse-shoe, and blue in the curve.

The other hand he looked at and beheld a ring on the little finger which he at once recognized.

The pretended Witch had seemed to forget the bent back, and straightened up several times.

Next he analyzed the voice, and suddenly he made the bold accusation, confident that he was not wrong, though he believed up to that moment that Perdido was at the bottom of the sea, for the Smuggler Queen had so led him to believe.

The moment he uttered the name Perdido, he saw that he was not wrong, and his visitor put aside all doubt by saying, quickly and meekly:

"Don't kill me!"

"Why should I not kill you, Perdido, when you treated me as you did?"

"You carried off with you what things of value you could; you attempted to rob and kill the Smuggler Queen, and I have found the hole you made in the closet that adjoins this room, where you kept your ear to hear what was passing here."

"Yes, I know you now, and as soon as you account to me for your coming here, and this wild freak, I shall kill you."

There was no doubting but that the money-lender meant what he said.

Perdido did not doubt it, for he knew the man.

But he had become calm now, and said, quietly:

"You will not kill me, for there are those waiting me without, who will soon come for me if I do not return."

"I knew what it was to face you, Don Rudolpho, so came prepared to be avenged did you harm me."

This took the money-lender slightly aback; but he said:

"Well, tell me what all this means?" and he laid the pistol on the table beside him.

"All what?"

"Your appearing here upon the heels of this Giant Buccaneer."

"It means that I am second in command on his schooner."

"Ah! you have turned pirate then?"

"Yes."

"And this trumpery about the Witch?"

"Oh, there is such a being, and she has wonderful powers."

"You believe this?"

"Yes, for I have seen her."

"Where is she?"

"On Death Island."

"Ah! and how came you to turn pirate?"

"I was wrecked in the Vulture on the Witch's Island, very nearly lost my life, but I was spared by the Witch and the giant, who was her slave, and a pirate schooner coming in, that had met the Death Craft and was doomed, she made the giant its captain, and I was appointed second luff."

"A strange proceeding all round."

"Yes, I think it was."

"And the officers of the pirate schooner?"

"They were put to death."

"Did not the crew object?"

"No, for the power of the old Witch held them in sway."

"And you wish to get rid of the Giant Captain?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I sent him to you, as he wished an agent here, and then I came myself to get your aid in getting rid of him."

"Yet he seems a wonderful man, and the very one to command a vessel."

"He may be; but I do not intend to play second luff to any man."

"Why do you not kill him, then?"

"The crew might suspect me; but if you get rid of him, it will be all right, and leave me in command of the Skeleton Flag."

"I see; but then?"

"I shall sail the seas, and the booty I get you must dispose of for me."

"I will do my best; but I had rather kill you, for I have not forgiven you for the trick you played me, nor for the fright you gave me at first, when I really believed you a witch."

"Well, seek your revenge, if you wish; but the story of that boy's death, and all your other crimes will come out against you, if I am harmed, for I came here prepared."

"Does any one but you know my deeds?"

"No."

"You are sure?"

"Certain; only if I do not return within an hour, there are those who will know where to look for me; and more, they have all my charges against you written down and sealed; but the seal will be broken if I do not return within the stated time."

The Don hastily glanced at his watch, anxiously fearing that the time might have passed.

Then he said:

"Well, as you hold the whip hand on me, so do I over you, and thus we are forced to have a truce between us."

"Yes, it's a case of diamond cut diamond, I admit," answered Perdido.

"Well, I will aid you."

"And get rid of the Giant Buccaneer?"

"Yes, in some way; but I must think up a plan."

"Do so, and I will see you again."

"Now, good-night, Don Rudolpho, and be careful not to dream of the Witch of Death Island, or you will have the nightmare."

"Curse you!" muttered the Don, as he let his visitor out, and then shut himself in his room to think over all the strange things that had passed that night.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE SEA OWL SETS SAIL.

WHILE Don Rudolpho, the money-lender, was receiving his last three visitors, Chester Granger was busy making his arrangements for his midnight attack on the Lady Maud.

He knew well what her capacity and sailing qualities were, for he had been a guest upon her in the days that were forever past for him.

Securing a horse, he dashed to the lake-shore at a sweeping gallop, and discovered the yacht lying rather close inshore, and with no other vessel very near her at anchor, she having changed her anchorage since he had come in on the coaster which had brought him from Mobile.

Going to a hut, a wretched sailor's inn, not far away, he hired a couple of boats for use, rowed them to a convenient point on the coast, and rode back to the city in the same sweeping gallop.

Arriving at the inn, he found that there was a party there to see him, and he reported that a score of men were ready, waiting to obey his orders.

"Don Rudolpho has been prompt," he said, and then he went to meet his new crew, procuring vehicles upon the way, and half an hour after they were on the way to the lake.

The boats were found where he had left them, the oars were muffled, and the party rowed out to the yacht.

"You follow me, my men, when we reach the yacht; but I wish no life taken under any circumstances, for there is only a negro crew on board.

"As I am known to them, and do not wish to be recognized, I will mask my face."

With this Chester Granger placed a mask over his face.

In perfect silence the two boats approached the yacht, one on either side.

The negro guard on deck was leaning against the mast dozing, and thought not of danger until he was seized.

"I need this craft, my man, so if you value your life, make no outcry," sternly said Chester Granger, and the frightened negro made no response.

"Now go down and tell your comrades that if they surrender quietly they shall not be harmed; but if they make an outcry, or resist, I will shut you all up below, set the yacht on fire, and send her out to sea."

With this fearful threat ringing in his ears, the negro went below, and then was heard the hum of voices in earnest conversation, one seeming to urge resistance.

"Come out of there, one at a time, or you shall die."

"I shall order you but once!" sternly said Chester Granger, and instantly he was obeyed, the negro first captured coming first on deck.

Then followed the others until all had come out, and were secured.

"Put them in the boats, lads, and pull them ashore."

"There leave them until morning, when they will be found and released; but gag them first, and see that they cannot escape."

"Oh, but you'll have ter suffer fer dis night's work, gemmans, for my young massa hain't one ter let dis pass," cried Woods, the negro mate, as they thrust a gag into his mouth.

But he was quickly silenced, and, with the others, was taken ashore.

There they were left in one of the boats, all huddled together, while the pirates returned in the yacht's skiff.

Twisting himself around as well as he could, Woods saw, with an almost broken heart, the Lady Maud's anchor hauled up, sail set, and then the pretty craft glide away and disappear in the darkness.

Violently he struggled to free himself, but found it a most difficult matter.

At last he began to rub the ropes about his wrists upon the boat's gunwale.

Frequently it would tear the flesh, but the brave negro kept up his steady motion, and strand by strand was cut.

But several turns of the rope had been taken around his wrists, and so tied that each one had to be cut.

Thus several hours passed away before he was able to free himself.

Then he took the gag from his mouth, and could hardly repress a shout of joy.

In a few minutes more his comrades were free, and at a rapid walk they started for the city.

Dawn broke while they were upon the way, and the sun arose above the horizon as they reached the grounds of the Brandt mansion.

The negro butler was just opening the house, but quickly he led Woods to the room of the young midshipman.

In amazement Irving heard his story, and then said:

"Woods, I do not wish my father, sister or Mr. Carr to know of this."

"If father does, he will not wish to return to the plantation, and I am anxious that he should; so go with your men to the Sea Owl, anchored in the river, and I will make some excuse and take the family over to the plantation in her."

Woods departed, and at the breakfast-table Irving appeared as though nothing had happened, but made an excuse about taking the Sea Owl instead of the Lady Maud, and being governed by the youth, it was so decided.

That night the news came of the escape of the Smuggler Queen from the *carcel*, and to Commandant Nazro Irving made known the fact of the Lady Maud's having been cut out from her anchorage.

The commandant was amazed, and told him that as soon as he could send Midshipman Nat Manly, with a crew, over to the plantation he would do so, that Irving might man the Sea Owl and make it his first business to hunt down and recapture the Lady Maud.

The morning after the escape of the Smuggler Queen, Colonel Brandt and his family, of whom Myrtle was now considered one, went on board the Sea Owl, to set sail for their plantation home.

Woods and his crew were on board, and the colonel asked, as he saw them all present:

"Who have you left in charge of the Lady Maud, my son?"

"She is in hands that will take the best care of her, father," was Irving's evasive answer.

"Oh, yes; I do not doubt that," responded the colonel, and then farewells were said to Commandant Nazro, Captain Palafox and other friends who had come to see them off, and the lugger-yacht set sail and headed down the river, Irving himself taking the helm.

As he thought of the capture of the Lady Maud, and the escape of the Smuggler Queen he could not but feel that the two had some connection, and wondered if it was really best that his father, sister, Myrtle and Bradford Carr should return to the plantation.

But Maud was married then, and he intended to tell Bradford Carr before he left, just what threats the Smuggler Queen had made, and also about the capture of the Lady Maud.

He knew that, put thus on his guard, Bradford Carr would keep a close watch for any danger that might threaten, while he, with the Sea Owl and a good crew, would take good care to find and capture the Lady Maud, if it could be done.

Not for himself did Irving feel blue, but for others, against whom he feared the Lady Captain might strike to avenge herself upon him.

Without incident the run down the river was made, and the Sea Owl went flying along down the coast on the waters of the Gulf.

Once in the open Gulf, and Irving felt more at ease, for he knew the speed of the little vessel, and had no fear of any pursuer overtaking him.

The following day he came in sight of the Death Island, as the desolate spot was then known to seamen, and was giving it a wide berth, when, looking searchingly at it through his glass, he said suddenly:

"Mr. Carr, there is some one on that island."

"It does not have the name of being inhabited, Irving, except it is peopled by the ghosts of the poor unfortunates who have been wrecked there," answered the tutor.

"Well, I distinctly saw a human form glide out of sight very quickly, as though fearful of being seen."

"It may be a wrecker or two dwells there."

"I will see, and if a wrecker, I shall see that he sets no false beacons there to lure vessels to destruction."

"Let her fall off before the wind, Woods, for I will run close in, anchor, and make a landing."

"And I will go with you, Irving."

"No, Mr. Carr, for if there was any trouble, Sis Maud would never forgive me if I got you hurt."

"I'll go with Woods and four of the boys, and if I find there is danger, I will retreat and leave the search until I get my navy crew."

Half an hour after, the Sea Owl ran close in toward the breakers, and Irving Brandt sprung into the lugger's boat, with Woods and four of the negro crew, all thoroughly armed, and rowed slowly shoreward, the midshipman acting as a pilot through the reefs in the reeds that encircled the Death Island.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

SLOWLY along the channel, leading through the reefs, Irving Brandt piloted his boat, the four negro oarsmen pulling with a steady stroke, and ready to "back water" in an instant at any threatening danger ahead.

But the channel was deep, and in some places quite wide, so that the youth's quick eye readily picked out a course through the dangers.

The hour was not far from sunset, and upon the deck of the yacht, which had let fall one anchor, stood Colonel Brandt, Bradford Carr, Maud and Myrtle, all attentively watching the boat alternately with the island.

The tutor had wished to accompany the youth, as also had the colonel; but Irving was firm in his determination not to allow them to do so, for he knew not what danger he had to face, and saw no necessity for his father and brother-in-law risking themselves.

"I've been used to danger all my life," said Myrtle.

"I think you might let me go."

But Irving was firm, and arming himself thoroughly, and bidding the boat's crew to do the same, he set out on his trip to the island.

Finding a spot to land, he rowed toward it, to suddenly discover that what he had deemed a cove was a bayou, or lagoon, penetrating into the interior of the island.

Up this he rowed for some little distance, and then landed.

The boat had now disappeared from the sight of those watching upon the yacht's deck, and they anxiously awaited its reappearance.

"Woods, I want you to remain in the boat, while two of the boys walk around the island this way, and two others that way."

"Keep along the beach, search the shores as you go along for anything that looks suspicious, and when you meet on the other side come back through the center, all together to the boat."

"Do you understand?"

The negroes gave a reply in the affirmative, while Woods asked:

"And which way does you go, massa?"

"I will climb this hill and go at once into the interior of the island."

"If you want us, massa, jist shout, or shoot a weepion, an' we'll come thar, sah."

"I know that, Woods, and I will give the signal if I need you."

"Now, boys, you start on your way, for Woods will put two of you across the bayou, and I'll take an inland hunt."

So saying Irving left the shore and wended his way into the interior at a quick step, climbing the hill before him, and passing on through the thicket of stunted pines that hid the center of the island wholly from view.

"Some one has been here lately, for I see tracks," he muttered, as he passed across a little rise, and entered a water-wash, or ravine.

He had not gone far before he came to a sudden halt, for a deep growl saluted him, and before him he beheld the way blocked, and with as deadly looking foes as he cared to meet.

There, across the ravine, in a row, stood a dozen huge bloodhounds, while in the center of them, keeping them in check, was Zulah, the Witch, dressed in deep black, wearing a crown of small infant skulls upon her head, and looking like a very fiend of the infernal regions.

Her eyes glowed like coals of fire as she

bent them on the young midshipman, who could not restrain himself from starting back involuntarily as he beheld the peril into which he had gotten himself, while she cried sternly:

"Well, boy, we meet again."

"We certainly do," he answered, calmly.

"You know me, then?"

"Yes, for I could never forget your face, once my eyes had fallen upon it."

"And what brings you to Death's Island?"

"Curiosity."

"It has lured many a man and woman to ruin!"

"I do not doubt it; but you came here, I see, after you escaped from the Witch's Island."

"I am here, there, everywhere."

"Everywhere except where you should be."

"And where is that, boy?"

"At the bottom of the sea."

"Ha! do you threaten me on my own territory?"

"I shall do more than threaten."

"What will you do?"

"Arrest you."

"On what crime?"

"The belief that you are a wrecker and display a false beacon."

"You have no proof."

"I have proof that you sought my life."

"And you would tear me away from my home, you say?"

"Yes, for your crimes have doubtless been many."

"If so, I do the suffering for them, not you."

"True, but I shall take good care that you do not cause others to suffer."

"Bah! you have no power to harm me, boy."

Irving glanced about him, and a trifle uneasily, for he remembered that she had had a large guard when on the other island.

"Where is your giant slave?" he asked.

"Gone."

"Where?"

"Ask the winds, not me."

"And your son?"

"Ask also the winds that wafted him away."

"And you are here alone?"

"Except my bloodhounds, I am alone."

"Well, though I am sorry I must wage war against a woman, I must make you my prisoner, so come with me to my boat."

The Witch smiled grimly, and said:

"Boy, you forget that though I have no human being to protect me, I am not alone."

"Come! you have the power to hunt me down on this island and drag me away to prison, where I do not wish to go."

"No, I wish to remain here, where I dwell alone and harm no one."

"Go and leave me, and say to no one that you have seen me, and tell them that the island is uninhabited."

"No!" said the midshipman, firmly.

"Well, I have asked you what to do for me, and you refuse."

"If harm befalls you, your crew will come to avenge you, I well know."

"But they will find only your bones, torn limb from limb by these mad hounds."

"You may kill one, two, yes three of them; but the rest of the pack will pull you down and tear you to pieces."

"Go and leave me, and promise me that you will not say that you have seen me, and all will be well."

"Refuse, and I give the order for my dogs to spring upon you!"

Irving Brandt fully realized his danger.

He knew that he could kill several of the dogs; but what a fate would be his.

Bradford Carr and his father would land and avenge him; but it would do him no good.

He knew that it was a game where both he and the Witch wished to play quits, and he had only one course to pursue, and he acted promptly, and said:

"You speak the truth, for I am in your power, as you would be in the power of my friends, if your hounds killed me."

"You offered a compromise and I accept it."

"You are wise, boy."

"As you are to offer it, Witch; but I have sent my men around the island by the beach,

so remain here with your dogs, and I will recall them and retire."

"And say nothing about seeing me here?"

"Yes, if those are your terms."

"They are."

"All right; but see to it that you and your hounds remain here until we leave the island."

Without another word Irving turned and retraced his way out of the ravine.

Crossing the island at a rapid step he soon came to a point where he caught sight of his negro crew, two and two, making their way along the beach.

Hailing them, he bade them come to him, and then led them back to the boat, taking good care to keep clear of the ravine.

With his crew of five men he could have attacked the hounds with success; but he had given his word and would not break it, and so rowed rapidly back to the yacht, which at once got under way and held on her course.

But, try as he might to hide it, Bradford Carr and the others felt that Irving had made some discovery upon the island which he would not make known to them; but they hoped he would soon do so.

Yet the voyage ended, and the Sea Owl dropped anchor in the little harbor of Brandt plantation, and the midshipman still kept the secret of his discovery on Death Island locked in his own heart.

CHAPTER XXXV.

AT HOME.

BRANDT MANOR Plantation was a lordly estate in those days, and had been built with no desire to spare expenses by its first owner, the father of Irving Brandt's mother.

It was of white stucco, large and roomy, with wide halls, vast rooms, and two stories.

It had the look of the home of luxury it was, and many were the gay times that had been enjoyed beneath its large, sheltering roof.

Vast flower-gardens abounded about it, a lawn dotted with live-oak and magnolia trees, sloped down to the little indentation in the coast, which was the haven; upon the left stretched away a grand forest, or park, and upon the right and in the rear were the cultivated fields, with the negro village back in the distance at the base of a slight ridge.

Carriage-roads and bridge-paths wound about the plantation, inviting drives and horseback rides; the haven was as quiet as a millpond for rowing, the Mississippi was the place for sailing, and the Gulf was beyond for deeper craft.

Back from the plantation some miles was a village, with other homes of planters scattered here and there along the coast for leagues in one direction, while in the other were dense forests, where the Sea Fox had had his retreat before he gave up his life of outlawry.

Other spots along the coast had also been the lairs of smugglers and baycu buccaneers, but as they never disturbed the plantations, the planters had learned to live without fear of them.

Such was the home and its surroundings to which Colonel Brandt and his family had returned, with Bradford Carr for his son-in-law, and Myrtle Marsden (she had dropped her father's name of Palafox, it having been Palafox Marsden) as members of the circle.

The home was the inheritance from his grandfather, of Irving Brandt, and he was often called the Boy Planter, while Maud had also inherited vast wealth from her mother and grandparents, their father, the colonel, being left only an income, on account of his weakness for gambling.

But this the world did not know, and the colonel was considered one of the wealthiest men of his day, where he had but a mere pittance in money, compared with the income of his son and daughter.

As the return of the family had been announced some time before, the overseer and house-servants had all in readiness to greet them, and a couple of hundred slaves, all dressed in their white suits and straw hats, or bandanas, according to their sex, assembled upon the shore to welcome them, for the yacht had been sighted miles away with the Brandt colors flying.

The traces of the fierce combat which had been waged upon the lawn, when one night the Sea Ghoul had landed to carry off Maud and rob the place, but had been met by the Sea Fox and his gallant crew and beaten off,

had disappeared, the gardeners having resodded the grass torn up by the iron shot of the defeated pirate in his retreat.

"Oh! I am so glad to get home," cried Maud, and, turning to Myrtle, she continued:

"This is your home, too, Myrtle, and you must be happy here."

"How can I be otherwise, Maud, where you and all others are so kind to me?" responded the beautiful young girl, with tears in her eyes.

"There is but one drawback to our joy," remarked Bradford Carr.

"And that is that my young pupil has grown beyond me, has become a distinguished naval officer, and must needs leave us to go where his duty calls him."

"But I am to be the coast-guard, you know, Mr. Carr, so will often be near; but I love a sea-life, and as I have won a midshipman's berth I shall strive hard to win my way round after round up the ladder of fame."

"But I hope to be here a couple of weeks at least, so do not let us have a thought to mar our joy," and Irving was turning away when Bradford Carr took his arm and said, in a low tone:

"Irving, your joy is forced, for there is something that worries you, and it has been more marked to me since your mysterious visit to Death Island."

"Will you not confide in me, and let me share your troubles?"

"Yes, some night I will tell you all that worries me, but not now."

"Are you in any trouble that I can aid you out of?"

"Oh, no; only that the Smuggler Queen has sworn revenge against me and mine, and I am so afraid she will strike here, now that she is free; but another time I will tell you all, to place you on your guard," and the conversation ended, for Bradford Carr would not press the youth further then.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE PLOT TO RESCUE.

THE morning after he had received so many very important visitors in his sanctum, Don Rudolpho, the money-lender, arose in no enviable frame of mind.

He had not slept well. He did not like the coming back of Perdido, whom he had believed, and hoped, was at the bottom of the sea.

He liked less the thought that he possessed the secret that he had sacrificed a boy, to test whether certain articles, placed in his hand by the Sea Ghoul, were meant to harm or not.

He did not like the Queen Smuggler's being in prison.

In fact, he had ample on his mind to worry him.

His spies reported the next morning that Chester Granger had cut out the Lady Maud from her anchorage.

But not a word did he hear of it upon the streets, and her sable crew had calmly gone on board the Sea Owl, Irving Brandt's captured cruiser.

Spies then reported that the Sea Owl had set sail, with the Brandt family on board, only the negro crew of the Lady Maud to man her, and that Palafox, the Sea Fox, and Commandant Nazro of the navy, had seen their friends off.

Why Irving Brandt had gone, he could not surmise, or learn.

This worried the money-lender.

Then he had on his hands the Giant Buccaneer to look after.

Next came Perdido, whom he could not put aside.

Chester Granger must be looked after, to keep out of the way of the Smuggler Queen.

Captain Merida must also be attended to.

Then the Smuggler Queen must be rescued.

"I'll make it a case of dog eat dog with the pirates, for I'll use one against the other," muttered Don Rudolpho, as he sat meditating in his office, after a rapid walk through the town, for the benefit of his nerves.

"First, I must arrange to free the Queen," he added, and he touched a bell.

"Bono, go and ask Saragossa to come here at once."

"Yes, senor."

A quarter of an hour after a low-browed Spaniard entered the room.

He had just such a face as any sculptor or painter would model or paint for that of an assassin.

He was flashily dressed, sported jewelry, and kept a *bodega* in the town.

"Well, senor, I received your message," he said, coolly seating himself without an invitation.

"So I see, and you are always prompt, Saragossa."

"I work quickly for you, for you pay well."

"And you'll have to work the better today, and your pay will be larger."

"Buenos, senor, *gracias*," and the Spaniard bowed low.

"I wish to get four uniforms."

"Senor?"

"I wish four marine uniforms, one of a lieutenant, another of a sergeant and two of soldiers."

"Yes, senor, I can get them."

"I need four men to put in them."

"I can fill the uniforms for you, senor."

"The officer must be a man of education, refinement and nerve, and the men must be fellows who can stand under a death-trap and not flinch."

"I can get them, senor."

"Do you know any man who closely resembles an officer at the naval quarters?"

"Yes, senor, there are several in my pay who do."

"Good! so much the better."

"I also want a vehicle with a driver who can keep his mouth shut."

"I have him, senor."

"I want a totally different vehicle to meet the other at a certain point I will tell you of."

"Yes, senor."

"You can supply all?"

"Yes, senor."

"When?"

"When do you wish them?"

"To-night."

"All right, Don."

"They must be drilled together in their work."

"Certainly, senor."

"And their pay shall be large."

"Of course, senor, if they risk their lives."

"And I do not wish to be known in the matter."

"Of course not, senor; but what is the work?"

"There is a prisoner in the *carcel* I wish to get out."

"Gold will do much, senor."

"Gold will not bribe them to let this prisoner go."

"Who is he, senor?"

"It is a woman."

"Ah!"

"The Smuggler Queen."

"Aha! I see, senor."

"She must be rescued to-night."

"She shall be, senor."

"My plan is for you to get the men I ask, secure a vehicle, one of the Government ones now being repaired at the shops, for I saw several there this morning, and put your officer and his party in it."

"Drive to the *carcel* and hand to the keeper this paper."

"Why, senor, this looks legitimate."

"Read it."

Then Senor Saragossa read the document aloud, and it purported to be an order for an officer to proceed with a sergeant and two marines, and take from the *carcel* to the prison-ship, the prisoner known as Rita, the Smuggler Queen, and place her for safer keeping upon the prison-ship.

"Find out the officer's name you wish to assume, and send me word and I will fill it in."

"The keeper will give you the Queen, without doubt, on this order, and drive with her to the deserted home half-way to the navy quarters."

"Then have your second vehicle there to meet it, and I will go there and await your coming, you giving the second driver orders to allow me to enter his carriage; but I will be disguised."

"All right, senor."

"Now you understand, Saragossa?"

"All but the pay, senor."

"You shall have a thousand each for the men."

"That is generous, senor."

"And double that amount for yourself."

"You are kind, senor, and all shall go well."

"Here is your pay now, and see that there is no failure."

"I will have no failure, senor, for the right men shall go," and the Senor Saragossa a ready tool of the money-lender's, took his departure.

CHAPTER XXXVII

AN ASTOUNDING DISCOVERY.

ALL day long Don Rudolpho was nervous. He tried in vain to plot some scheme by which he could get Chester Granger out of the way, and then make use of the Giant Buccaneer to rid him of Perdido, instead of the way his treacherous clerk wanted it.

As for Captain Merida, he would play him against the Giant Buccaneer, or *vise versa*, according to which one had the deepest pocket.

"I must play my cards well, and get all I can out of them, for I am getting too many irons in the fire to handle all of them without being burned."

"The fact is I am a very rich man, and I've got my wealth in a way that I can carry it with me at a few hours' notice."

Diamonds, rubies, emeralds and pearls are the surest investment for gold.

"They pay me no interest, but my loans of gold bring me several hundred per cent. to make up for what they lose, so I am far ahead in the long run."

"Now my desire is to win the love of this beautiful woman, Rita."

"If I can win her hand, good! her love I'll try to gain afterward, and when she is my wife I'll slip quietly out of these scenes that have known me, and seek a new home and new associations elsewhere, and no one will ever know that the millionaire gentleman and his lovely wife were once Rudolpho the money-lender and the Smuggler Queen.

"Ah me! sometimes memories of the past will crowd upon me; but I must banish all such, as they are buried in the grave of forgetfulness."

"I wish I could think what is best for those pirate captains, the Giant, Granger, Perdido and Merida."

"But I cannot, for my brains is all in a whirl until I have rescued Rita."

"Then there is time enough for them, and I will make one cut the other's throat, as the Giant Buccaneer seems to have done with Merida and his officers."

"But I must not worry about them today, for Rita is in my thoughts."

"I have had the rooms she is to occupy made into a perfect *bijou* home, and she can dwell there in safety, riding and driving out vailed at her pleasure, until she is my wife."

"But suppose she casts me off?"

"Ah! this cannot be, for she will not do that."

"But if she does, those rooms are a jail, safer than the one she will escape from to-night, and there she shall remain until she consents to be my bride."

"No one will know that she is there, other than her old negress, whom I found wandering the streets, after her mistress went to the *carcel*.

"She will be faithful, and all will be well."

"But no more confidential clerks for me, as I cannot risk discoveries."

"Well, I must walk out and quiet my nerves."

So saying, Don Rudolpho was about to leave his sanctum when Bono ushered in a visitor.

The money lender had expected a messenger from Saragossa, and had told the youth if any one came, to admit him at once.

But this caller was not a messenger from the Senor Saragossa, and more, he was one the Don cared not to see.

But he was in for it, and said coldly:

"Well, Captain Palafox, how can I serve you?"

"You can rather serve yourself, Don Rudolpho, for I am in need of no loans at usurious interest, nor do I wish to raise gold on jewels, or smuggled and piratical booty," was the response of the man who had given up piracy and so well served the Government that he had been made a Gulf guard-officer.

"Then why seek me, senor?" impatiently asked the money-lender.

"To give you a piece of advice."

"I am not asking advice, Captain Palafox."

"No, but you must receive it."

"You remember that I called upon you some time ago, and warned you in no way to commit yourself to any scheme that might bring harm upon Colonel Brandt, or any one of his name or connection?"

"Yes, nor did I, nor do I expect to do so."

"His yacht, the Lady Maud, was cut out from her anchorage in the lake last night, and my spies trace the crew to a place where you hire your men for your dirty work, so I called to say that I am watching you, and if any harm follows the cutting out of the yacht, to any member of the planter's family, I shall hold you responsible."

"Good-day, Don Rudolpho," and without another word the Sea Fox departed.

This visit rendered the money-lender more uncomfortable, and he muttered:

"That man is dangerous and must be got rid of— Well, Bono, what now?"

"The Senor Saragossa, senor."

"Ah! what news, senor?"

"All works well, Don, and here is the name to fill in the blank," said the Senor Saragossa, as he entered the room.

"Good! now let there be no mistake, and, elated, the Don took his walk to calm his nerves."

Several hours after, just at dark, he walked rapidly down to the deserted house, the appointed rendezvous.

There he found the carriage awaiting, and, after a word to the driver, he took his seat inside.

An hour passed, and then came the rumble of wheels.

Up dashed a vehicle the next instant, and a man, looking like a sea-officer, sprung out and said to the driver of the waiting carriage:

"Go and report to your master that the prisoner has escaped."

"Say that when the keeper went with me to the cell, he found it empty."

Don Rudolpho gasped for breath, and then said sternly, without showing himself:

"Driver! go with all speed to the *bodega* of the Senor Saragossa!"

Away rolled the vehicle, with the money-lender inside, and nearly beside himself with rage and amazement, for the Smuggler Queen had escaped, and he had not been the one to rescue her.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

IN THE CITY PRISON.

As Rita, the Lady Captain, was driven beneath the arched gateway of the *carcel*, her heart seemed to grow cold with dread.

But she quickly threw off the feeling, and met the keeper with a defiant air and flashing eyes.

"You are the Smuggler Queen?" he said, as she stood before the scribe of the prison to be regularly entered as a prisoner.

"I am so called."

"You have another name?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"The Lady Captain."

"Yes, but your Christian name?"

"My name is Rita."

"What else?"

"It was Rita Restel."

"And now?"

"Is Rita Keys."

"Ah! your father was the Smuggler King?"

"He was."

"And your husband?"

"Was Barton Keys."

"The pirate?"

"Yes."

"Also called the Sea Ghoul?"

"Yes."

"Your age, please?"

"Twenty-three."

"Your trade is that of smuggling?"

"Yes, and piracy," was the cool rejoinder.

"I will place you in the cell occupied by your late husband."

"Thank you."

"And there you will await your trial."

"No trial is needed, when I acknowledge all that I am."

"Let me be sentenced at once."

"You will have to be tried, and you are in

the hands of the naval authorities, only placed with us for safe keeping until it is decided what to do with you."

"Hang me, as I am a pirate."

"No, you'll escape the gallows; but I think you will spend your life in prison."

"It may be."

"Have you any weapons about you?"

"Yes."

"Please give them up," and the keeper held forth his hand.

Drawing from the folds of her dress a pistol, she handed it to him.

Then she took from her bosom a jewel-hilted dagger, and gave that up also.

"Are these all?"

"Do you think I am an armory, to carry more weapons?"

"I would like to feel sure that you have no more."

"Then search me."

"No, I will not do that, but take your word."

"Thank you."

"Now let me be placed in my cell for I am weary, body and soul," and for the first time her voice quivered.

She was led away to the same cell that her pirate husband had occupied, and left, the night she had so boldly rescued him.

It was not an uncomfortable place, though upon it was the chill that hangs over all cells.

The keeper called a woman servant, who had grown gray and bent in those prison walls, and bade her look to the comfort of the beautiful, but dangerous prisoner.

"I will," said the woman, whose face and heart had grown as hard as the stone walls, from her long association with criminals and their miseries.

Into the cell Rita walked, and glanced about her.

An easy-chair was placed in it, the cot bed was not a bad one, a table was also given her and without, in the corridor, a lamp gave her light.

Dismissing the woman, she threw herself upon the bed and for a long time shook with emotion.

For a long time she seemed to suffer fearful anguish.

Then she conquered her emotion, and became perfectly calm.

Undressing herself, she lay down, and seemingly forced herself to sleep.

With the morning sunrise she awoke, and Nance, the old white-haired servant, appeared with a good breakfast.

With an effort she ate, and then was again alone.

At noon Nance appeared again with her dinner.

Of this Rita ate heartily, and chatted with the old woman, asking her all manner of questions.

Taking several gold-pieces from her purse, she handed them to her.

"No, I take only my wages for serving prisoners."

"But you will let me pay you for your kindness?"

"No, kindness should never be paid for, and my work I get my money for every month," was the cold reply.

The Smuggler Queen eyed the woman closely, and she saw that no amount of gold would tempt her to betray her trust.

After a while she asked:

"Are you allowed to go out of the prison at will?"

"Yes, but I never ask it, for I have nothing to carry me outside."

"This *carcel* is my home, my world."

"But I wish you to go for me."

"Send a messenger."

"No, I wish to make some purchases at the shops, and I would like, if you can get off after supper, if you would go out for me."

"I will do that," answered the old woman, who, like her sex, was not proof against the opportunity of "shopping," even for another.

"Well, after you bring my supper, come ready to go out, and I will give you the money, as I need a number of things."

"I had better go this afternoon."

"No, I have not got my list ready; but to-night you can go, and if you are detained late, you can keep the things and bring them to me in the morning."

"I will have to do that, as, after night, no one comes in here."

"You will have to get permission, I suppose?"

"Yes, a written line to pass the guard; but the chief will give that to me when I tell him what I want."

"All right; I will make up my list this afternoon, and have it ready for you, thank you," and a sweet smile of the beautiful smuggler, even touched the stony heart of the old jaileress, who took up her tray and departed, happy at the thought of her intended shopping excursion.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A WOMAN'S BOLD ACT.

ALL that afternoon, the Smuggler Queen paced her cell, her brow clouded, her lips set firm.

Her thoughts were evidently busy with some bold scheme, and she seemed to be anxiously awaiting the hour for the coming of the old servant with her supper.

Since the hanging of her husband, the face of the Smuggler Queen had grown haggard; but it did not mar its beauty, and the light that dwelt there, in her hope for revenge, seemed to keep up the flush and excitement.

At last the shadows, ever in the cell, began to deepen into blackness.

Then the lamp in the corridor was lighted, and the step of the woman was heard approaching.

Nerving herself to what was before her, the Smuggler Queen threw herself upon her bed and pretended to be asleep.

The woman had the key, set her tray of dishes down and unlocked the door.

Then she entered, locking the door after her, as was her wont.

The Smuggler Queen still appeared to be asleep.

"Lady, awake, for I have your supper here," she said, in her peculiar voice, which was strangely squeaky.

With a start the woman sat up, rubbed her eyes, and asked with a yawn:

"Is it supper-time?"

"Yes, and I have brought you your supper."

"Thank you."

Nance bustled about to arrange it on the table, trying to attract attention to her being dressed up, for what woman does not wish to make another admire her clothes?

Rita saw this, and said pleasantly:

"Why, you are all dressed up."

"Yes."

"And how nice you look in that dress and pretty bonnet."

"Thank you; but I don't wear them often."

"Are you going out on a frolic?"

"Oh, no; but don't you remember you asked me to go out and make some purchases for you?"

"Ah, yes; I had forgotten, and it was very kind of you to remember it."

"Here is the list and the money in my purse; but did you get leave?"

"Oh, yes; here is my pass."

She handed a slip of paper upon which was written:

"Pass bearer (employee Nance) out of gate and return.
NOLAND, Chref."

"Yes, this is very nice; but let me examine that bonnet, for it is a pretty one."

It was of the style then worn, coming far over the face, and covered with ribbons.

The Smuggler Queen gently took it off, looked at it with seeming admiration, and then said gently:

"Let me put it on for you."

Nance yielded without a word, and apparently arranging it from behind, the small, shapely, yet sinewy hands suddenly grasped the throat of the woman in a vise-like grip, that could not be shaken off, and prevented all outcry.

With wonderful tenacity they clung to the shriveled throat of the old woman, who struggled hard, but could not throw off the grasp upon her.

She breathed heavily for a while, then her arms fell powerless to her side, and she sunk unconscious upon the floor.

Raising her with wonderful ease, the Smuggler Queen placed her upon the bed.

Then she hastily disrobed her of her outer clothing, heavy shoes and bonnet, and slipped them on herself.

Next she drew from her bosom a dagger with a keen edge, and the gray hair was severed from the head, and quickly placed over her own forehead.

The pass was next secured, and the purse of gold was left on the table for the old woman, with a note which the Smuggler Queen had already written for her, telling her to forgive her unkind act, but that her life was dear to her.

Rubbing some dark powder over her face, and then unlocking the door, the Smuggler Queen stepped out into the corridor and proceeded with a step that was an exact imitation of the old woman's, toward the outer part of the jail.

Her form was bent at the same incline that Nance walked, and she passed slowly on.

"Well, old Nance, you are rigged out as I haven't seen you in a month of Sundays," said an under keeper who was on duty in the outer corridor.

"What business is it of yours, man?"

"I pay for my own clothes," was the surly answer, in a perfect imitation of the voice of the old woman she impersonated.

"Well, Nance, which way?" asked the guard at the door leading into the court.

"I have the papers, man," came the answer, and she held it up to view.

"All right, Nance; but don't you stay out late, skylarking with the boys," laughed the guard.

Crossing the plaza, or court, the disguised Smuggler Queen halted before the last guard, an officer who stood at the *carcel* entrance, out upon the *banquette*.

He read her pass in silence, and simply nodded, and she was without the prison walls.

"Free! free! Can I believe it, and so soon?" she said, in an undertone, and then turning the nearest corner, she walked along at a rapid pace.

At last, coming to a part of the *banquette* that was overhung by orange trees, causing it to be very dark beneath, she kicked off the large shoes, which she had drawn on over her own, and hastily drew the dress over her head.

Next came the bonnet, which she replaced by her own hat, which she carried, and rolling them into a bundle, she tossed them over the wall into a garden.

Then she hastened on her way, turning one corner after another, until at last she reached Chartres street.

A short walk down this brought her to the shop of Rudolpho, the money-lender.

Bono saw her enter hastily, and advanced to meet her.

"It is necessary that I see your master at once, and I do not desire to be seen by any one else than yourself in the shop," she said.

"The Don is out, lady; but come into this little room and await his coming, please," said Bono, pleasantly, struck by her great beauty.

"Thank you," and the Smuggler Queen sunk into a seat, and, as the door closed upon the boy, said earnestly:

"Now, I am safe, and I can begin my work of revenge against that accursed midshipman, whose hands are stained with the blood of my father and my husband."

CHAPTER XL.

DON RUDOLPHO'S GAME TO WIN.

NEVER in his life did Don Rudolpho feel more utterly beaten than he did upon discovering that his plot, or rather Chester Graner's plot, which he was using had miscarried, and that Rita, the Smuggler Queen, had escaped without his aid.

With bitterness in his breast he entered the shop, and passed rapidly on into his sanc-

tum.

"A lady to see you, senor," said Bono.

"I don't want to see her."

"She's beautiful, senor, and seemed anxious not to be seen, so I showed her into the ante-room."

This caught the attention of the money-lender.

Could it be the Smuggler Queen?

She had escaped, and what was more natural than that she should come to him to aid her?

"Show her in at once!" he said, earnestly.

Purposely he turned his back when she entered, that Bono might not see any meet-

The Giant Buccaneer.

ing, and the door closed behind the visitor before the money-lender turned.

"Lady Rita! the Virgin be praised!"

"So my scheme succeeded well and you are free?"

"How I rejoice that I have been the means of your rescue, dear lady," and the money-lender grasped Rita's hand in both his own.

In amazement she looked at him, while she said slowly:

"Your scheme to effect my rescue, Don Rudolpho?"

"Yes, lady."

"I certainly do not understand you."

"Let me explain then."

"You see, I was walking along the *levee* two evenings ago when the lugger came in, on board of which you were a prisoner.

"I took a stand behind a tree, and watched—"

"Ah! I remember seeing some one there."

"Yes, my dear lady, it was your friend, the money-lender.

"I saw you carried off to the *carcel*, and I at once determined to rescue you."

"Then I returned to the yacht, and by bribing one of the negro crew who were sent to the yacht Lady Maud in the lake, as the lugger was going to be hauled out for repairs, I found out all that had taken place."

"All?"

"Yes, lady."

"Do you know that my poor husband was hanged?" and Rita's voice was hoarse with passion.

"I do know it, lady, and you have my deepest sympathy; but remember, you are not friendless, for I am here to protect you."

"But to your story, Don Rudolpho, please, though I thank you for your interest in me."

"Well, having learned all, I knew what would happen to you."

"And what fate did you think would be mine?"

"Imprisonment for life."

"It doubtless would be, if I was content to submit to it."

"I at once determined to rescue you, and you know there are wheels within wheels, so to speak, which, when set to work, all do their duty."

"I sent for my spies and for others, and at last I hit upon a plan."

"I secured a blank order with the Government seal and private mark of the commandant of the naval forces upon it."

"This I filled out to an officer of the quarters, ordering him to take a sergeant and two marines and go to the *carcel*, and bring you to the prison-ship."

"To this I forged the name of Commandant Nazro, and ordering a vehicle, sent picked men to do the work, paying them a large sum—"

"Which I will refund you, Don Rudolpho."

"By no means, for what I spend for friendship is outside of business, my dear lady."

"But to go on with my story— Yet why tell it, for you are here, and that proves its success."

"My dear Don Rudolpho, when did you send these men?"

"An hour ago."

"And an hour ago I left the prison."

"And my men brought you here, as I ordered."

"No, señor; I came here alone, and I did not see your men."

"Then, in the name of Heaven, how did you escape?" cried the Don.

"I escaped unaided, señor, as you soon will know, when the story flies through the streets on the morrow."

"But how?"

In a few words the Smuggler Queen told her story, and Don Rudolpho listened to it in admiration and amazement combined.

"You are a wonderful woman, Lady Rita, a wonderful woman."

"Thank you, señor, and believe me, I appreciate all that you have at least attempted to do for me."

"Upon leaving the *carcel* I knew not where to go, so came to you, to have you fit me out in some disguise, that I may go and get quarters."

"That is all arranged, lady, for I have a suit of rooms in this house for you, all fitted up, and I have a surprise for you, too."

"And what is that, Don Rudolpho?"

"I met your old negress—"

"Oh, Ninah! what of her? where is she?"

"She is beneath this roof, for I brought her here, to place her in charge of your rooms."

"You are so kind, Don Rudolpho."

"Not at all, dear lady; and you know that this is a grand old house, with a great deal of vacant space in it, and I have had your rooms in one wing, overlooking my own court and garden, and where no one can see you."

"Old Ninah can care for you, and in a disguise I will give you, you can drive out or ride out at your leisure, and try and forget your sorrows."

"But I have a sacred duty to perform," said the woman, in a voice that quivered.

"You are revengeful, you mean?"

"Yes."

"And mean to avenge your father and husband?"

"I do, so help me Heaven!"

"There is time enough for that; but first get back your rosy cheeks, and then look out for revenge."

"Have you seen my lieutenant?"

"Which one?"

"Chester Granger, whom that accursed midshipman set free."

"No."

"I cannot believe that he has deserted me, for he said he would do all in his power to get me free, for I would not accept my pardon from Irving Brandt, and I told him to come straight to you."

"He has not been here, my lady."

"This is strange, for he seemed like one who would not desert a friend in trouble."

"He was a fine young man, Lady Rita; but I guess he felt that the risk would be fearful and gave it up; but come with me to your room and give old Ninah a glad surprise."

Locking his office-door the Don led the way by a secret stairway beginning at a cleverly concealed panel in the wall up to the floor above, and by a narrow hallway to a wing.

Here he led the Smuggler Queen by the hand, for all was darkness, and soon came to a halt.

A key was turned in the lock, and a door was opened, showing a small ante-chamber.

Crossing this, another door opened, and Rita found herself ushered into a large and comfortable room, with two others opening into it.

The rooms were cheerfully furnished, a number of books were upon the table, a harp stood in one corner, a guitar lay upon a divan, and then there were paintings upon the walls.

One of the other rooms was a bed-chamber, and the other a semi-kitchen and dining-room combined.

The windows looked out upon a garden surrounded by high walls that had not a break in them.

At one of the windows stood the old outlaw negress, Ninah, and she had not heard the entrance of the money-lender and her mistress.

Across each of the windows were heavy iron bars, and the shutters, though open, were also of iron.

"Mammy Ninah!" called out the Smuggler Queen.

Instantly the old negress dropped upon her knees, raised her hands above her head, and, without looking around her, cried:

"Oh, Lordy! Lordy! Missy Rita am dead, an' dat am her voice callin' old Ninah from de hebbens."

"No, no, Mam' Ninah, I am not dead, but alive with you."

A cry of joy from the old negress, and she fell at the feet of her mistress.

"This bell will call me, lady, if you need anything," said the money-lender, as he left the room.

But once outside he muttered:

"At last she is in my power."

CHAPTER XLI.

FOR GOLD AND REVENGE.

AFTER having escorted the Smuggler Queen to her rooms, Rudolpho, the money-lender, felt at ease, and sallied forth to learn what he could of the escape from the *carcel*.

It had hardly become known to the public

that the Smuggler Queen had been captured and the Sea Ghoul hanged, when the startling information was flying through the city that she had escaped.

The party sent by the money-lender had been the means of making the discovery of her escape for, upon going to the cell they found the old servant woman just recovering consciousness and gasping for breath.

In a few words she told all, and the pretended marine officer was only too glad to hasten away with his men, under pretense of carrying the news to the commandant.

But an officer from the navy quarters dropping in soon after, said that he knew no such order had been sent, and word was at once dispatched for Commandant Nazro, who was at the Brandt mansion, and it all came out how a bold attempt had been made to rescue the Lady Captain, and which would have been successful had not the daring woman already rescued herself.

Such was the news flying about the town, and it reached the ears of the Don, who then hastened back to his home.

Hardly had he taken his seat before the bell rung gently, which communicated with Rita's rooms.

Instantly he locked the outer door, opened the secret panel and ascended to the wing.

A tap on the door, and old Ninah opened it.

"Missy want to see you, sah," she said.

In her rooms the woman had found a quantity of clothing, which the thoughtfulness of the money-lender had placed there, and she had put on a chamber robe that was exceedingly becoming to her.

"My dear Don," she said, softly, "I sent for you to again thank you for all that you have done for me."

"Do not speak of it, lady."

"But I will speak of it, for I find these rooms most delightful, my dear old nurse Ninah, here to wait on me, the pantry full of delicacies, fruits in abundance, a wardrobe at my service, and all that heart could wish."

"Now, what does all this mean?"

"It means, Lady Rita, in serving you, I give pleasure to myself."

"It is very kind of you, señor; but you must allow me to repay you in some way."

"Do not speak, lady, of repaying what love prompts me to do," and the Don placed his hand over his heart and bowed low.

"Ah! I remember, my dear Don, that you once did me the honor of saying that you loved me."

"And I love you to-day, lady."

"Then I was the wife of Captain Keys; but to-day, alas! I am free."

"Yes, and in your own good time I would beg that you become my wife."

"My dear Don, you are so kind to ask it; but I was half-way bound to my lieutenant, Chester Granger—"

"Ha! to him?"

"Now don't get jealous, for it was conditional, for I told him to do his duty in saving my husband from the gallows, and if he did all he could and failed and Captain Keys died, I would marry him."

"He did all in his power, we rescued my husband; but he was afterward hanged, so I am, or was, bound to the lieutenant."

"But as he has broken faith with me, by not coming to seek me or attempt my rescue, I end my contract with him this night and will make one with you."

"You will make my heart very glad, lady."

"It is my desire to reap a fearful revenge upon all who bear the name of Brandt."

"Yes, lady."

"I desire to get into my power Colonel Brandt, Bradford Carr, Maud Brandt—"

"Now Mrs. Carr."

"Ha! is she married to that man?"

"Yes, lady, to-night I heard so."

"Well, let it be so; her happiness and his shall be short lived."

"Then I wish also to get into my power that accursed boy, Irving Brandt."

"It shall be as you wish, lady."

"You can arrange this for me?"

"I can."

"How, señor?"

"I will secure a vessel and crew, go to the Brandt Plantation, whither they all sail, and capture the whole party."

"Then I can carry them to some island, when you can come and join us, and have them wholly in your power."

"Will you do this?"

"I will."

"You pledge yourself, Don Rudolpho?"

"I do, lady."

"Then I pledge myself to become your wife as soon as you have placed these people in my power."

"I have no more to say to night, Don Rudolpho, but do not delay in keeping your pledge."

"I will not, lady," and upon returning to his sanctum the Don found Bono knocking loudly at his door.

"Well, Bono, what is it, for I was out in my garden?" he said, quietly.

"That big planter is here to see you, senor."

"Show him in."

The next moment the Giant Buccaneer entered.

"Ah, Captain English, glad to see you, sir."

"And what have you done for me?"

"I'll tell you, sir."

"First. I want you to run your schooner through the Rigoletts, and you'll find, over on the shore, nearest the river, hiding in some bayou, a very pretty yacht."

"She will have on board a score of splendid seamen and a young and gallant officer."

"The men you can win over to your side, but the young officer you must threaten to hang unless he will become your lieutenant."

"This will give you a good crew, and you can sail back with the yacht and schooner, leaving your vessel deserted, and keeping to the little craft."

"I don't clearly understand, senor."

"Listen and you will."

"You have a lieutenant whose name is Perdido?"

"Yes."

"Well, that man you must leave upon the schooner, ironed hands and feet, in a state-room of your cabin."

"Why must I do this?"

"Because he has sought to betray you and me too."

"Leave him there, as I direct, and I will see that he is punished."

"Then you sail in your yacht to an anchorage in the lake, and come to me, and I will give you a forged letter, pretending to come from Irving Brandt, the middy, and addressed to the commandant, telling him he has captured his yacht, with the aid of yourself and a crew you raised in Mobile, and beg him to send the schooner Sea Fox right round on an important service, and that he sends you and your men to act as a crew under Captain Palafox or any officer he may send in charge."

"Captain Palafox sent three-fourths of his men on a frigate to-day for a short cruise, as I know, but he will take the balance and go in command."

"Once out in the Gulf and you must kill Palafox and those of his men who will not join you, and you will have the finest craft afloat."

"Now do you see my plan?"

"Yes; and a good one it is and shall be at once acted upon."

"Don't forget to have your old schooner deserted by all except Perdido, and take nothing except your booty from her, as the Sea Fox is thoroughly armed and stored."

"I will do as you say."

"As for the lieutenant, Granger, if he does not go with you, kill him, for he may be a dangerous foe; but if he enlists with you, keep him at sea."

"Now do you understand?"

"Perfectly."

"Then pay me my money, captain, and luck to you."

With this the Giant Buccaneer paid the sum asked by the money-lender and departed, while the Don, a few moments after, received another visitor.

"Ah, Captain Merida, I am glad to see you, for I have news for you."

"I am certainly glad to hear it," was the answer of the pirate captain, who was looking less haggard than the day before.

"You want a schooner?"

"Yes."

"You want revenge upon one who has wronged you?"

"Whom do you mean?"

"There was one on the Witch's Island that commanded, and the Giant had to obey."

"How know you this?"

"He was one who looked like a Monk and Satan combined, and three nights from this I will have him in your power."

"Where?"

"You will meet on the lake-shore three-score men, whom I have engaged as a crew for you."

"A pilot will be with them to guide you to a bayou, where a schooner lies hidden."

"You will find her fully armed and equipped, and in her state-room will be a man in irons, and the only one on board."

"That man is the one who wronged you, and you can either put him to death, or sail with him to Death Island and there land him by night, leaving him there, though you must not put foot on the island, or allow your crew to do so."

"I will obey you."

"Enough, then, for you know what you are to do."

"Give me the price of the vessel, please, and the amount I will have to pay your men as bounty."

The money was counted out, and Captain Merida too took his leave of Don Rudolpho, who was chuckling with delight at the bargains he was driving for his own pocket, and at the same time working out his plot of revenge against Perdido and Captain Palafox.

As for the Giant Buccaneer, he felt that he might be of service to him in the future, as also might Merida, the pirate; but, with Perdido safe on the Death Island, the Sea Fox dead, and Chester Granger at sea as a buccaneer officer, he did not have much fear for himself.

It was a desperately bold game to add to his ill-gotten wealth, get a dangerous rival out of the way, and to get rid of two men whom he feared, Perdido and the Sea Fox.

But then the Don was just the man to play such bold games, and successfully.

CHAPTER XLII.

LEFT TO HIS FATE.

CHESTER GRANGER, the reader will remember, successfully cut out the Lady Maud from her anchorage in the lake, and, after running the Rigoletts, sought the hiding-place on the coast, where he could go across the neck of land to the Mississippi river, and meet the boat, which the money-lender had told him would bring the Smuggler Queen to him.

He did not for a moment doubt the good faith of the Don, and little dreamed that he was being made a tool of by that cunning rascal.

Finding a safe retreat he left the yacht, and sought the river shore to wait.

Impatiently he waited while the hours dragged along; yet still no boat came in sight.

He dared not leave when the expected hour came round at which he was to meet the Smuggler Queen, and passed, for something might delay her.

So, with several of his men he waited on, little dreaming that there was trouble brewing for him.

Unmindful of the danger, too, in that secluded spot, the men on the yacht were not keeping guard, and saw suddenly sweep down upon them several boat-loads of men.

Before they could offer resistance, one whom they recognized, threw up his hands and shrieked:

"Ho, crew of the Lady Maud, we come as friends!"

Then the men advanced and told the yacht's crew that they were to give up the yacht and go in a schooner, for so orders bad come from their secret agent in the city.

Without a word against it the men consented, and then messengers were dispatched for the lieutenant, who, unsuspecting danger, returned in haste, hoping to hear news of the Smuggler Queen from that quarter.

Instantly he was seized and carried before the Giant Buccaneer, who sat in the cabin of the schooner, which was anchored further down the bayou.

In amazement Chester Granger gazed upon the huge chief, who said sternly:

"Well, senor, you are my prisoner."

"Yes, so I have discovered; but, as you are an outlaw, as I am, is it not a strange thing to make war against one who is of the same league?" boldly asked Granger.

"I do not make war upon you, unless you force me to do so."

"Your crew have joined me, I have a good vessel in view, will have some eighty brave fellows, and need just such a man as you are for my first luff, so offer you the berth."

"I thank you, but cannot accept it."

"You must."

"But I have another duty to perform which I cannot neglect."

"You would do well to save your life by serving me."

"Save my life?"

"Yes, for if you accept my terms I will spare you, if not I will kill you," was the cool response of the Giant Buccaneer.

Chester Granger loved the Smuggler Queen; but he loved life more, and after a few moments of thought he said:

"Under such circumstances, I can do nothing else but accept."

"Do so, and you'll find me a friend, for I like your face; but, as you are doubtless known to those that I may have to deal with, and we have a bold deed to perform, I will give you a disguise to put on, if you will give me your pledge you will speak to no one, and make no effort to escape, until we are in possession of another vessel I have in view."

"I give you the pledge."

"Enough! now we will set sail in the schooner, and your yacht shall follow."

Soon after the two vessels were under sail, and back to the retreat, which the schooner had left, they went.

"Now, Senor Perdido, your career under my command ends this night," said the Giant Buccaneer, addressing that exceedingly amazed personage, as the schooner came to anchor in the bayou.

"Great God! what can you mean?" gasped Perdido, who was naturally a coward.

"Just what I say, sir."

"Here, men, put the officer in irons, and make the chains fast to that ring-bolt!" came the stern order of the buccaneer chief, and, unheeding the entreaties of the lieutenant the men obeyed, and Perdido was left alone on the schooner, which remained at anchor in the bayou, while the yacht, with the Giant Buccaneer and his now large crew set sail for an anchorage at the lake-shore landing of the Crescent City.

The sudden change toward him, by the Giant Buccaneer, Perdido could not account for.

He meant himself the death of the man he hated, as did his mother, now that he had broken the bonds of his slavery on the island; but he had not expected retaliation.

Could it be possible that the money-lender had betrayed him?

No; he certainly had nothing to gain by that, excepting revenge for his deserting him as he did.

Thus thoughts flashed through the mind of the man in irons, as he sat in the state-room of the schooner.

Not a sound could he hear on deck, and he felt that he was utterly alone.

The thought nearly drove him wild, and his coward fears conjured up all kinds of terrors when the night should come on.

Thus the day passed away, and it was one of long agony to him.

Then slowly the shadows deepened, and darkness came.

Perdido fairly trembled with awe, for he had been left in that lone spot, alone with his conscience, and upon a vessel wherein he knew now that he was the only human being.

Presently a splash came against the sides, then a slight shock, followed by a voice crying:

"Follow me, lads!"

Scores of feet sprung upon the deck and rushed hither and thither.

No one met them to resist their way.

"My God! they are Government men and I am doomed!" groaned the prisoner.

"Down this way, lads! here, bring that lantern to me!" cried the same voice that had before spoken.

Then a light flashed in the cabin, rapid feet advanced, the state-room door was thrown open, and Perdido beheld before him, Captain Merida, of the pirate schooner, Skeleton Flag!

He had believed him to be dead, and his teeth chattered.

But the pirate cried:

"Ha! here is the one I was told I would find here."

"You, sir, can tell me how it is I expect to seize a vessel, and find it my own craft, with you the only one on board."

"I will tell you all, if you will spare my life," whined Perdido.

"Oh, your life will be safe enough, senor; but talk quick!"

"It was the work of the giant, who held you prisoner on the Island."

"He had a grudge against me and brought me with him in irons."

"To-day he deserted the craft to get another one, I believe, and left me here."

"Well, I care not what has become of him, so I get my craft again; but she is robbed of the treasure I left."

"Still the seas are broad, and hands and hearts are willing to make more; I'll do it, even if I have a strange crew."

"And you will allow me to go with you as an officer?" asked Perdido.

"Yes, you can go with me, but not as an officer, and only for a limited time."

"Come, lads, get the schooner out of here, for we must raise our flag in deep water when the sun rises!"

Orders were given at once to get the schooner under way, and an hour after she was sailing merrily along under a fair breeze.

Determined to keep his contract with the money-lender, and anxious to get rid of Perdido, whom he looked upon as a "Jonah," Captain Merida headed for the Death Island, and, although it was night when he reached there, he sent a boat with Perdido to feel its way ashore.

Perdido had learned something of the channel, and his own fears caused him to direct the coxswain how to steer, and soon he was set down upon the island.

But the irons were not taken off of him, and the boat returning to the schooner, he was left to his fate, for the Skeleton Flag sailed swiftly away in the darkness.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE SEA FOX'S STRATEGY.

THERE was no more stirring man in the service than was Captain Palafox, the reformed rover, for he was constantly striving to redeem his past lawless career, for the sake of his beautiful daughter, by serving the Government all in his power.

This did Rudolpho, the money-lender, fully realize, and he kept his spies constantly upon the track of the Sea Fox, knowing that he was very apt to give him trouble at any time, and in a most unexpected way.

Having, however, discovered that the noted rover had settled quietly down in his inn, after the departure of the Sea Owl with the colonel and his family on board, the money-lender began to carry out his little scheme, and so set the Giant Buccaneer and Captain Merida to work in the accomplishment of their ends, which were so largely to favor their own.

The reader has seen that the Giant Buccaneer captured the yacht, made Chester Granger a prisoner, swore him over to serve him, and then deserted his schooner in the bayou, leaving Perdido the only one on board.

Having done this act, just as the Don desired, he sailed in the yacht for the lake-shore, and at once reported to the commandant, with the pretended letter of Irving Brandt.

The commandant was impressed by the noble appearance of the huge man, and at once told him that he would send him and his crew on board the Sea Fox, sending the captain of that vessel in command, and having him sail with all dispatch to carry out the scheme the midshipman suggested in his letter.

At this the Giant Buccaneer was delighted, and said he would have his crew ready to go on board within a couple of hours.

He also asked commander Nazro how many there would be in the Sea Fox's crew, and learned with secret pleasure that there would be not more than a dozen.

Just then the Sea Fox himself came in, and, though anxious to start, when the supposed letter of Midshipman Brandt was read to him, he stated that it would be impossible to get off before midnight, on account of certain repairs needed to his vessel, and that

he would run up opposite to the city when ready, and take the giant sailor and his crew on board there.

Argument was useless in favor of an immediate start, for the Sea Fox was firm, and so it was decided, after which the giant and the rover returned to the city together, the latter to make some purchases.

Separating at the tavern, where the giant had his men stopping, the Sea Fox went his way, while the former was compelled to impatiently wait the coming of night.

Chester Granger, in disguise, had not been permitted to leave the tavern, having had an espionage held over him by the crew, and he sat in his room alone, and with a heartache at the uncertainty of the Smuggler Queen's fate, for he had not heard of her escape.

Several hours after nightfall, the lookout on duty on the levee reported the schooner coming up, and the entire crew were quickly on the landing.

As the schooner ran in to the pier, Captain Palafox gave the Giant Buccaneer a friendly greeting, and bade him come on board with his crew, which numbered some sixty men.

"You have a large force, sir," said the Sea Fox.

"Yes; there are just fifty-nine of us, all told."

"And you?"

"I managed to scrape up a few more men, so as to give us a good force."

"And how many have you?"

"There are twenty-one of us, sir," was the reply; and the different crews were assigned to their duties, while the Sea Fox went flying down the river under a stiff breeze.

Thus several leagues were cast astern, and all was going well on deck, when suddenly Captain Palafox, who was standing by the side of the Giant Buccaneer, dealt him a stunning blow on the head, with some hard object he held in his hand, which felled him to the deck as though he had been struck dead.

At the same time in trumpet voice the Sea Fox cried:

"Ho, Sea Foxes, at them and do your duty!"

A cheer answered the words of the Sea Fox, and every one of his crew, who was standing near one of the Giant Buccaneer's band, began an attack on him, while up from the hold, and out of the cabin, where they had been concealed, poured a stream of humanity, armed to the teeth, and some three score in number.

At the same time, battle lanterns, already lighted, illuminated the deck, and the scene became one of grandeur, yet appeared like a fiery holocaust from which no human being could escape.

The crack of pistols, clashing of sabers, groans of the wounded, shouts of the combatants, and trampling of feet, mingled in the grand but fearful chorus.

At the helm stood two of the crew of the Sea Fox, and they held the flying craft, running like a ship load of demons on her way.

Taken by surprise most completely, where they had expected to surprise, the Giant Buccaneer's men were panic-stricken, while their huge chief still lay as though dead upon the deck.

With yells of rage and fright, when they saw that they could not withstand the onslaught, many of them sprung into the river, while others cried for quarter, when they suddenly saw their last officer, who had fought like a fiend, fall, run through the heart by the sword of the Sea Fox.

"Ha! that man is Chester Granger.

"But I will be merciful, and those who love him shall never know that he died on a pirate deck," said the Sea Fox, and he raised the form of the misguided man and threw it overboard into the river.

"Now put irons on that huge fellow, who I verily believe is shamming unconsciousness," ordered the Sea Fox.

Then, as if to prove the truth of the words, the Giant Buccaneer suddenly sprung to his feet.

Back from him the men shrank in terror; but he had no idea of facing them, for, with a bound, he reached the bulwarks and sprung into the river.

A score of shots rattled after him, and the Sea Fox rushed to the side and sprung into

the shrouds; but the huge form was not seen to rise again above the murky waters.

Then the Sea Fox gave the order to put the vessel about, and back to the city she sailed, and Captain Palafox had placed another laurel on his brow by his clever detective work in getting the secret of the Giant Buccaneer's intention, and so successfully carrying out the bold plan he had formed to save his vessel.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE WITCH AND HER SON.

IT was certainly a most pitiable condition for Perdido to be left in, upon the Death Island, and in irons.

But the pirate captain cared not what became of him, so he carried out his instructions from the money-lender, which was to leave him there.

He knew not whether the island was inhabited or not, and cared nothing, so as soon as he had accomplished his task he set sail, determined to change the names of himself and vessel, raise a different flag from the skeleton one, and cruise in other waters for riches.

Whether he carried out this intention or not, it is very certain he was not seen on the Gulf shores any more by the Government cruisers, or the coast-guard vessels.

When left on the island Perdido was not so wretched as might be expected.

Life was better than death under any circumstances, and he knew that his mother, old tattooed Witch that she was, dwelt there, and for the present he would be content, and trust to getting away at some future time, for such a desolate life as she led did not at all chime in with his views of an earthly existence.

He saw the boat row away, and then the schooner grow dim in the distance, and was about to drag his way to the ravine where his mother's quarters were, when he fortunately remembered the hounds.

"They did know me, but I dare not risk it to see if they have kept up the acquaintance," he muttered.

Ironed hands and feet, he could do little, yet to remain there would be to have the bloodhounds discover him, and his fate would be instant death he feared.

So he dragged himself slowly along, fearful lest the rattle of the chains might catch the ears of the dogs, and at last reached a small boat.

But it was upon the sands, and he could not, handcuffed as he was, get it into the water.

So he walked on until he came to a stunted pine.

Up into the branches of this, with great effort, he drew himself, and then he hailed loudly:

"Ho! Mother Witch, ahoy!"

At his first cry the baying of the hounds began, showing how great had been his danger, and soon their pattering feet were heard approaching, and next the whole pack were at the foot of the tree, leaping up and yelping with frenzied rage at not having come sooner.

"Ho! the Witch ahoy!" again he hailed, and in his loudest voice.

The Witch had not heard the first hail, but the yelping of the hounds had aroused her.

Hearing the second hail she became white with dread, for she was superstitious herself, and believed at first that the cry came from the clouds.

But, when it was repeated a third time, she knew that the sound came from the shore, where the hounds were so furiously baying, and she hastily dressed herself and hurried thither.

"Who are you?" she called out.

"I am Perdido, your son," was the answer.

Instantly she called off the dogs, and then aided her hopeful down to *terra firma*, while she cried:

"My God! what does this mean?"

"The Giant Buccaneer got tired of me, robbed me, put me in irons and landed me here some hours ago, and in vain have I tried to rouse you," answered Perdido, with ever ready lie.

The Witch aided him to the cabin, threw wood on the fire to make a bright blaze, and then looked over her collection for keys to unlock the manacles.

At last she found one, and Perdido was soon free.

"Now tell me all," she said, sternly.

Perdido told what he pleased, and added:

"It was a shame for him to do this after I had directed him to my old employer, Don Rudolpho, the money-lender."

"*Don Rudolpho!*" cried the woman.

"Yes."

"Describe that man, my son," uttered the Witch, hoarsely, while her eyes flashed wickedly.

"He is a handsome man, a good size, graceful, with pleasant manners, and a dark face."

"Has he a scar upon his hand?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Across the palm is a blue mark."

"Great God! at last! at last!" and the woman bowed her head and trembled violently.

At last she said, hoarsely:

"Perdido, my son, you must go with me to New Orleans."

"Mother!"

"I mean it."

"But how?"

"A small sloop drove in here through the channel a few days ago, and her crew of three men landed.

"The dogs saw them, and of course killed them in short order, and we can go in that vessel."

"When?"

"With the dawn," was the reply, and the Witch looked desperately wicked, as she spoke.

With the rising of the sun the little sloop was standing away from the Death Island, the bloodhounds upon the beach eying its departure wistfully, and howling dismally at being deserted.

CHAPTER XLV.

P E R D I D O ' S S T O R Y .

"MOTHER, why are you going to the city now, when you have seemed to wish to hide from the eyes of men?"

The question was put by Perdido to his mother, the tattooed Witch, as the two were sailing over the Gulf in the direction of New Orleans.

The young man was at the tiller, and the woman was sitting forward, lost in deep reverie.

At his words she got up slowly and came aft.

Taking a seat by his side she said in a low tone:

"You wish to know, do you, Perdido, why I shun the eyes of man?"

"Yes, mother."

"Look at me."

"Yes."

"Do even your eyes consider me a beauty?"

"The tattooing disguises you, mother."

"Disguises me?"

"Yes; but your features are good, and your form is graceful."

"Still, would I be looked upon as one to admire in civilized life?—though, in the South Seas, the natives consider this tattooing marks of distinguished beauty."

"Mother, gold will buy good opinion, and we will be able to defy the world with your wealth, and you will be sought after, rather than shunned."

"Yes, if I have gold enough; but I have not."

"You have a vast quantity of jewels."

"True, but they will only bring a handsome living for us, and I must have a vast fortune, so as to defy all public opinion, and bring men—ay, women, too, to my feet!"

"But can you ever get this?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"Well, wait a few days and see."

"If I fail in a purpose I have in view, I will go back to Death Island, and with my false beacons drag vessels to destruction, and their booty will enrich us; but it will take time."

"But why are you now going to the city?"

"To see one person."

"Who is it?"

"I care not to tell you now."

"I wish you would tell me of your past life."

"What would you know, boy?"

"All."

"First tell me of yourself."

"There is not much I remember of the far past; it seems like some dream to me."

"But when I recall early recollections, I remember being on shipboard, and the sailors making much of me."

"I made many voyages, cruising first in one ship and then in another."

"Now I was on a merchant craft, then on a cruiser, and at last I was captured by a pirate schooner, who adopted me as his son."

"For some years I was with him; but he was a foolhardy fellow, fought all odds, and one day in the Gulf was fool enough to fight a Government vessel, was defeated, and I saw him strung up to the yard-arm."

"I told the Government officers that I was a prisoner on board, and the men helped me out in it, so I was brought to the city and released."

"One night, walking along the levee in New Orleans, almost destitute, I saw two men spring upon another, who suddenly approached them."

"He fought them boldly, but was knocked down, and would have been killed and robbed had I not gone to his rescue."

"I knifed one of the men, and the other ran off."

"But the one I aided was quite badly hurt, so I took him home and dressed his wounds, for I am something of a surgeon."

"He asked me what I was doing for a living, and I said nothing."

"So he gave me work, and finding that I wrote a good hand and was pretty well informed, he made me his confidential clerk."

"That was *Don Rudolpho?*"

"Yes."

"The money-lender?"

"Yes, mother."

"And why did you leave him?"

"Well, I had once before met the Smuggler Queen."

"I was then in the Government service, and she was at school, and I met and loved her, or thought I did."

"I overheard her talk with the *Don*, and knowing that she intended to go in the ship *Vulture* to Mobile, and carry with her a large number of jewels, which she always does, I concluded to desert the money-lender and make a strike for myself."

"I also knew that the *Vulture* was to have a crew of the *Don's* put on board, to seize her on account of her valuable booty, so I got on the good side of some of the men, started a mutiny, and all would have gone well but for that accursed midshipman who was on board."

"In the trouble he caused, the *Vulture* went on shore on your island."

"And I am glad that she did."

"So am I now, mother."

"Well, Perdido, you have had a checkered life; but I will yet have riches for you to spend, which will make you a millionaire."

"You are very kind, mother, and I will be a dutiful son."

"But you have not told me why you are now going to the city, or anything of your past life, and that of my father; but I suppose there has been much of sorrow for you in the past."

"There has indeed, Perdido, and I will tell you all," and the woman spoke in a manner that showed her inmost being was stirred by the remembrance of what she had gone through.

CHAPTER XLVI.

T H E W I T C H H A S S O M E T H I N G T O S A Y .

"You would hear of my past, my son," said the Witch, after she had remained silent for some time.

"Yes, mother."

"Well, it is that past that has made me what I am, a blot on God's earth, a crime-stained woman and a curse among my kind."

"It is that past that has made you what you have been, and are, a wanderer, a pirate, and a man of such sins that the tears of angels will never wash out."

"It is that past that has made one other what to-day he is, too despicable for the regard of a dog."

The Witch spoke with intense feeling, and Perdido, seeing the working of her face, as

she strove to keep calm, felt sorry that he had called up the past.

Again was the woman silent for a minute or more, and then she said, and with a voice that had become perfectly calm:

"Perdido, my son, I come of English parents, and of a noble family."

"Your father was a squire's son, and a dashing, handsome youth."

"His father's lands joined my father's estates, and I often saw your father riding by, always at a breakneck speed, and heard him spoken of as the greatest dare-devil in the country."

"One day when out riding with a party of young friends, my horse became frightened and dashed off at terrific speed."

"We had just passed the young squire, as your father was called, and the ladies of the party, who were from town and visiting me, had all remarked upon his handsome appearance; but, his father and mine were on ill terms, and had been for years, so we never spoke to each other."

"As my horse darted away I heard the clatter of hoofs behind, and all had started to try and overtake me and check my maddened animal, for I was powerless to do so."

"But my horse sped rapidly away from all of them, and in despair I looked back, for I knew the crags were before me, and, if the fright-maddened animal went over them I was lost, for they went down sheer a hundred feet to the rocks below."

"In that look I beheld one horseman ahead of the others."

"He was coming along like the wind, and his red huntsman's coat told me who it was."

"It was the young squire."

"He was mounted upon a racer, and though my horse was a fleet one, and running from fright, he gained rapidly."

"Nearer and nearer my horse drew to the crags."

"Instead of taking the road leading to one side, he held on down the path that led to them."

"On, on he flew, and despairing I glanced back."

"Almost upon me was the young squire, and he was raking the flanks of his horse with his spurs."

"Far in rear came my crowd of friends."

"Right before me was the cliff, and I reeled in my saddle, giving up all hope."

"But just then I felt an arm encircle my waist and raise me from the saddle, and I was saved."

"Upon the very edge of the cliff he reined his horse back, while mine went headlong down the steep to be dashed to pieces below."

"Perdido, from that moment I loved the man who saved my life."

"But my proud old father was unforgiving, and he refused to even notice my presence."

"The result was we met secretly, loved, and ran off and got married."

"His father cut him off from his inheritance, and my parents disowned me."

"But he had a few thousand pounds in his own right, and he bought goods and started out on a trading voyage, carrying me with him, and you, for you were a very little boy then."

"In the South Seas we were driven ashore on an island and wrecked."

"All on board lost their lives, and were washed overboard, for they were on deck, excepting your father, you and myself, and we were in the cabin, for a mutiny was raging among the drunken seamen."

"The next day the storm subsided, and the natives came out in their canoes."

"One of them, the chief, spoke English, and we were spared and carried to their village."

"But, oh, Perdido! the life we led there."

"You see how I am disfigured."

"Well, they did it all, and I suffered the agony of the accursed in mind and body."

"They wished to tattoo you, but knowing some of their sacred rites, I tattooed over your heart the marks you bear, and upon your father the same."

"If he lives, as I believe he does, he bears those marks to-day, as you do."

"Well, years passed, and one night a vessel appeared off the island."

"It was becalmed, and over a league away."

"I saw your father crouching in the rocks

on the shore watching it, and dared not go near him, for I knew his intention was to swim out to it as soon as it was dark.

"This he did, and I expected him to return with the crew of that armed vessel and rescue you and I."

"He could have done so, oh! how easily; but no; he turned against me in my deformity, and deserted us both, while he went his way in joy at his escape."

"Next you were taken from me, and what I suffered none can ever know."

"At last I found an opportunity to escape, and gladly I did so."

"I had jewels hidden away through all, and they served me well."

"But people turned away from me in disgust, and for what I had in gems they sought my life."

"Thus it was that I became a dweller upon the Haunted Island."

"Thus it was that I became wicked hearted, and loved crime."

"At last you came to me, and I was again happy."

"Now I go to the city, for I believe that I will find there none other than your father, the man who so cruelly deserted us."

"And if you do, mother?"

"Ah! what a revenge I will have!" she said, almost joyously.

"I cannot blame you, mother."

"You dare not, after all that I have gone through."

"Now, Perdido, my son, so well worthy of your sinful mother, you know just who you are, and the story of your mother's life."

"What your father is, and has been since his cruel desertion of us on that South Sea Island, we are to find out, and then, woe be unto him!"

CHAPTER XLVII.

A DOUBLE REVENGE.

NEW ORLEANS was kept in a perfect ferment of excitement, by the startling incidents happening in its midst daily.

The escape of the Smuggler Queen became noised through the town, and its daring filled all with surprise.

Then the attempted rescue of her, by those professing to be marine officers, leaked out, and there was another topic for the gossips to discuss.

The capture of the Lady Maud also became known, and then her sudden coming back, with the quick departure of the schooner Sea Fox, a strange crew and a giant leader upon her decks.

But back to her anchorage appeared the Sea Fox with the dawn.

Her decks were blood-stained, her hold was filled with wounded men and prisoners, and the story of the strange attempt to capture her, and the thwarting of it by the gallant Sea Fox himself, flew like wildfire through the city.

Of course Don Rudolpho was among the first to learn the latter startling tidings.

He sat in his private office thinking the matter over attentively.

"Well, I'm sorry the giant was wiped out, for I could have used him some day, perhaps."

"As for Merida, he has done well and is off, and I don't doubt but that he will leave that wretch, Perdido, on the Death Island, and that will end him."

Chester Granger is gone, and that takes out of my way a dangerous rival; but then I need not have feared him, with Rita in my power, as she certainly is, for no sound can reach the outer world from those rooms, and unless she becomes my wife they shall be her tomb, for once I close those iron doors, she is in a safer spot than were she in the *carcel*.

"But she will marry me, when I have gotten her foes into her power; only I must go carefully, for that Sea Fox is on my track."

"How he could have discovered the game of that Giant Buccaneer, I do not understand."

"But he did do it, that is certain; and, as he is dangerous, my first duty must be to close his term of life."

"Then to get hold of the Brandts, and next to make Rita my bride, and seek a home far from here."

So mused the daring, cunning, cruel Don

Rudolpho, the money-lender, and after his musings he walked out to lay his plans for the death of the Sea Fox.

But days passed away and he still lived, and then back to New Orleans came Irving Brandt, on the Sea Owl, he having decided to at once go out cruising along the coast in his vessel, as suspicious crafts had been seen of late in Mississippi Sound, and of course he connected the escape of the Smuggler Queen with them, and believed that she was getting ready to strike a blow at him through those he loved.

After a consultation with Commandant Nazro and Captain Palafox, it was decided that the Sea Owl and Sea Fox should both start together, beating around the whole Gulf coast for suspicious vessels, and, to the deep chagrin of the money-lender, his intended victims suddenly disappeared.

"I had the plans all ready to kill the Sea Fox, and to get the boy into my power, so as to take him before the Smuggler Queen, and their departure has foiled me," he muttered.

"A lady to see you, señor," said Bono.

"Who is she?"

"Don't know, señor, for she is veiled."

"Well dressed?"

"Yes, señor."

"Show her in."

The next moment a woman entered the sanctum of the money-lender.

"Don Rudolpho, I believe?" she said, in a low tone.

"Yes, señora."

"A money-lender, I have heard?"

"Yes, señora; but may I ask who it is I have the honor of addressing?"

"It is not necessary for you to know, señor; but I have called on business."

"Ah! I am at your service, señora."

"You make large loans, I am told?"

"Yes."

"I need a large sum."

"How much?"

"Call it a hundred thousand dollars."

"That is a large sum."

"Then you cannot lend so much?"

"Oh, yes, far more, if you need it, and the security is good."

"It is in gems."

"They are always good."

"I shall need it for several years."

"It matters not how long."

"You must be a very rich man, Don Rudolpho, to allow a hundred thousand dollars in cash to go out of use for years."

"I will be getting interest on it of course."

"Yet others will want loans."

"I have the money to accommodate them."

"You are indeed a wealthy man."

"Have you the gems with you, lady?"

"Yes; they are in this bag."

He poured the contents of the little sachet upon the table, and after glancing over the numerous trinkets spread out before his gaze, said:

"Here is ample security, and the wealth of a pirate."

"In fact, they look like pirate plunder."

"What they look like you have nothing to do with, Don Rudolpho; your business is to hand me the money, but first I must ask you for a glass of wine, for I am faint."

The wine was brought, and the woman said:

"You will join me, of course?"

He poured out two glasses, and then she said:

"Will you draw my chair nearer, for I am really ill."

As he did so she quickly poured a liquid from a small bottle into his glass of wine.

Then she said, as she took her glass:

"You will pardon me if I turn my face when I drink it, for I do not wish to be recognized?"

"Certainly, lady," and as she turned her face away and raised her veil, he poured the glass of wine into his sleeve, while he smacked his lips, and said:

"That is delicious wine, lady, as you will find."

"Yes," she said, absently, and as she spoke some object in her grasp caught his eye in a mirror, and he started.

Then turning to him she said, hoarsely:

"Rudolph Don, we are quits at last!"

"Oh, God! who are you?" he gasped.

"The wine you just drank was poisoned, and within five minutes you will be dead."

"See, now do you know who I am?"

She raised her veil and the face of the woman was revealed.

The man staggered back from her, perfectly livid, while she said;

"You are rich, immensely rich, for your own words confessed it, and I, as your wife, whom you deserted on that island in the South Seas, will get it all, for I have tracked you at last."

"But ere you die, Rudolph Don, you shall see your son, whom you also deserted."

"Here, Perdido!"

She stepped to the door, and Perdido entered from the shop.

"Great God!" again gasped the money-lender.

Then he stretched forth his hands, like a man grasping at objects in the air, and, tottering forward, fell upon the floor.

"He is dead, and I am avenged."

"Now we will return to our inn, my son, and lay claim to his vast wealth."

In silence they glided from the room and out of the shop.

But hardly had the door closed upon the tattooed woman and her scarcely less wicked son, when the money-lender sprung to his feet.

He was livid, but had an evil light in his eyes.

"Great God! they have tracked me."

"But it was an inspiration of mine not to drink that wine, and then to pretend to be poisoned."

"She thinks me dead, and it is better so."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

BONO, THE MONEY-LENDER'S CLERK.

DON RUDOLPHO, the money-lender, fully realized the fact that he had been brought to bay.

He was overjoyed at having escaped the poison intended for him by his revengeful, but cruelly-used wife; but he knew that he dared not remain longer in the city.

If he did, she would expose him as he was, and Perdido knew him as he really was, be the danger to them what it might.

No, there was but one course open to him, and that was to fly.

That he had no time to lose he well knew.

The Don had considerable booty in his shop, that would bring a round sum; but to save that was not to be thought of then.

He had gold in his secret vault, and a large quantity of precious gems.

These he could secure to take with him.

He also had in the banks quite a large sum, which he must draw out at once.

Calling Bono, he wrote drafts for the amounts on each bank, and said:

"Get this money and return with it in all haste, for I have a large loan to make."

"I will find you here, señor?"

"Yes; but should I not be, await me here."

"Yes, señor," and Bono departed with the drafts, while Don Rudolpho said to himself:

"Now to go and see the fair Queen of the Smugglers, for she shall share my lot, be it what it may, and I will not go alone."

"But just let me dispatch a clerk to charter me a coaster in which to sail to San Augustine, for that will be my first port to make."

The clerk was called and dispatched with orders, and then the money-lender touched the spring in the wall, the secret panel flew open, and he disappeared within.

But the panel did not close tightly behind him, for a draught of wind blew the end of the table-cover near it into the open space, and there it held, while Don Rudolpho went on up the secret stairs not knowing the tell-tale crack he had left behind him.

Half an hour after Bono returned, a leather sachet full of bank-notes in his hand, and the room being unoccupied, the first thing his keen eyes lighted upon was the secret panel held slightly ajar.

Having made this discovery, Bono determined to make more.

He was of an inquiring turn of mind, and had courage to back up his curiosity.

In fact there was something peculiar about the boy, and this circumstance the Don had often noted.

He was a handsome lad of sixteen, well built, and as quick as a flash in his movements.

He had come one morning to the money-

lender in rags, and begged for work, saying that his parents were dead, that he had gone to sea, but finding the work too hard for him, he wished a clerkship.

Writing a beautiful hand, and quick at figures, the Don had taken him without reference, and had gradually advanced him, until he stepped into Perdido's shoes as confidential clerk, when that worthy deserted his master to the better serve himself by robbing the Smuggler Queen.

With the satchel clasped in his hand, Bono went to the door communicating with the ante-chamber, and locked it, for he wished no one coming in from the shop.

Then he went to the secret panel and peeped through.

All was darkness therein.

But he was not to be thwarted, so he went back into the shop, took up a dark lantern, lighted it, and returned to carry out the daring design he had formed of discovering just where that secret passage led.

CHAPTER XLIX.

WHAT BONO DISCOVERS.

OPENING the secret door, Bono held it thus an instant.

Did he release it, it would fly to with a bang.

He saw that it could only be opened with a spring, if once closed, upon either side, but where that spring was he could not discover.

His plan, therefore, was to keep it from closing, and this he did with the cloth from the table.

Then he walked slowly up the stairway.

It was walled up upon either side, and not two feet in width, the steps being very steep and narrow.

Arriving at the top he found himself in a narrow passageway, seemingly built between or into the walls of the house.

At the head of the steps he saw a panel, and this evidently opened into the main hallway on the upper floor; but he could not find the secret spring to open it.

Going along the narrow passage for quite a distance, he suddenly heard voices.

Instantly he closed his lantern, and all was darkness about him.

But as his eyes became accustomed to the darkness he saw before him a crack of light.

It did not come from a lamp, that was certain, but from daylight.

From thence he also heard voices, and quickly he approached the spot.

He stood by a narrow iron door that opened into a small space like an ante-chamber.

Across this was a second door, also of iron, and padded on the inner side.

That was ajar also, and the boy muttered:

"I am in luck."

The room further on, he could see, was well furnished, and the sunlight was streaming into it.

But the surroundings, the way of approach, and all, convinced the boy that he was looking upon a secret chamber.

"There is something queer in all this," he muttered.

"The Don has some dwellers in this old rookery, after all.

"Well, I will find out, if I die for it."

With this bold determination he entered the ante-chamber and stood by the crack of the inner door.

A person was speaking, and it was not the Don.

What was said the boy heard as distinctly as though he had been in the room with the speakers.

"You see, massa," he heard, "de missy were taking a arternoon siesta, an' she hain't dressed yet, sah, an' you must excuse her, for ladies does take long ter fix up."

"But she say she be out soon."

"I would not care, Ninah, if I was not in a great hurry, so tell your mistress, please, to hurry, for I have been here now a long time," and the Don's voice, for he was the speaker, was somewhat impatient.

"Oho! now I see what all these stores were bought for; and the Don told me he intended to take his meals at home, and have a cook employed," muttered the boy.

"Yes, sah, I tells her," said old Ninah, and she disappeared into an inner room, while Bono distinctly heard the Don mutter an oath of impatience.

A moment after a woman swept into the

rooms, and at her first words Bono whispered to himself:

"It is the Smuggler Queen."

"Pardon me, señor, for detaining you so long," she said, in her sweetest tones, "for I know that your time is precious; but I was asleep, and had to dress."

"You are more than pardoned, lady; but I came in haste to see you."

"Has anything gone wrong?" she asked, quickly.

"Yes, my spies inform me that I am suspected of harboring you, and that I am to be arrested to-night, and you will be seized and sent into solitary confinement, no one shall know where."

"Great God! can this be true?"

"It is true, lady."

"And I will cause you all this trouble?"

"Do not mind that, for I am ready to fly at a moment's notice, and I have my riches in such shape that I, with the aid of Ninah and yourself, can carry a vast fortune."

"And I must go, of course?"

"It would be madness to stay here."

"But where?"

"We will decide that when we get away."

"But I have always lived ready to depart at an hour's notice, and we can throw them off the scent."

"There, in that closet, you will find disguises of all kinds, and you and the negress can rig yourselves up, while I return to the office to do likewise."

"I have sent Bono to the banks to draw my money in bills, and when he returns I will go into my vault, get my treasure, and come here for you."

"At the head of the stairs is a secret panel, which will lead us into a hallway of this old mansion, and thus out into a garden opening upon another street."

"From thence we can make our way to the *levee*, wher I have already ordered a coasting-craft to be in readiness, and can fly from this dreaded place."

"But my revenge?" said the woman.

"Once safe ourselves, lady, we can look to revenge, for you know that those you seek to harm are on the coast, and we can readily run there some night, with a good crew, and you can avenge yourself as best you wish."

"True, it is best."

"Now, I will be off, and—"

But Bono heard no more, as he glided away noiselessly, feeling his way along the walls and down the steps.

As he reached the panel door leading into the office, he heard two clicking sounds from above and behind him.

"The doors of their rooms close with secret springs, and I believe they are prisoners, though they do not suspect it," he muttered.

Hastily removing the table-cover from the panel, he closed it softly, and glided out of the room before the money-lender should arrive.

CHAPTER L.

A BOY'S WRONGS.

SEEKING the shop, Bono glided out into the open air of the street without being noticed by his two fellow-clerks.

He was excited, nervous and very pale.

His thoughts were busy with the past, and as memory came to him it brought only bitter remembrances, which found vent in a low muttering as he walked rapidly along, still grasping the sachels of bank-notes, for the lantern he had laid down upon entering the shop.

"Must I allow that man to escape?" he murmured.

"Oh, God! how memories crowd upon me!"

"I remember how he was my father's friend, or at least he so believed him."

"It was years ago now, ten years, and I was but eight years old, for I am eighteen, though he believes me sixteen."

"He came to our house nightly, and was but a snake in the grass."

"We were rich then, for I remember the luxury we lived in."

"My father was a grand, handsome man, and he loved my mother, my little sister and myself so devotedly; but he would gamble, and that snake in the grass led him on."

"I recall how one night father came home."

"I was asleep upon the sofa, and he awoke me by coming in, though I did not move."

"Mother was away, visiting a sick friend, and Lita, my baby-sister, was in bed."

"Father was greatly excited and paced the room, talking aloud to himself."

"I remember he said:

"Is that man my friend or my foe?

"He always wins from me at cards, and sometimes I almost fear that he cheats."

"Then, too, he seems to regard my wife more in the light a lover would, than a friend."

"I doubt him, and yet I may wrong him, and I will wait until I have proof that he is the villain I am led at times to think."

"I remember that I thought it wrong to listen to my father, so I got up from the sofa."

"Some weeks more passed, and once again I was in the library, sleeping in my favorite nook, when he came in, for I always would wait for him."

"Mother had retired with little Lita, and the house was all silent,

"Again my father was excited, and talked to himself.

"Not noticing he went on:

"Ruined! yes, I am utterly ruined, and that man, Rudolpho Ramon, has done it."

"Oh, God! that I should ever have trusted him."

"Now I am wholly in his power, for this night I signed away to him my last dollar."

"Great God! this is madness, ruin and wretchedness that I cannot stand."

"I dare not face my wife and children, so they shall gaze upon me dead, and then perhaps forgive me."

"But that devil, Don Rudolpho Ramon, has cheated me out of my fortune, and I have nothing to leave to those I love but a suicide's name."

"I remember how wild with fright at those words, I sprung to my feet, just as there came the report of a pistol, and my father fell dead before my eyes."

"Never shall I forget that night, and the anguish of my poor mother."

"I told her of the words of my father, and she cried bitterly:

"Oh! I am his murderer, for I led him on to trust that man."

"Now I know, when I believed him our friend, and trusted him as though he were my brother, urging that he should make his home with us, as he seemed alone in the world, that he has been the snake in the grass to bring ruin upon us."

"I can never forgot then how Don Rudolpho showed his real character, by asking my mother to become his wife, before my father was cold in his grave, and when she spurned him, he turned us out of our home, for he held all our riches."

"I can never forget how my little sister Lita was stolen from home one night, and then that my mother died almost a beggar of a broken heart."

"Then I became a wanderer about the world, and have seen hard knocks."

"But as I grew older, it seems that revenge has been growing within my heart, and I sought service under Don Rudolpho to ruin him."

"My chance has at last come, and I will now act."

"Wee be unto you, Don Rudolpho, the money-lender, and may heaven forgive me for what I do."

The youth had walked a long way by this time, and turning quickly he retraced his steps.

Arriving at the shop, he went to the sanctum door and knocked.

No answer came. Again he knocked, more loudly than before.

Still no answer.

He knew that the Don generally kept the door locked; but he would try it.

"The señor was asking for you, Bono."

"He said you was to wait here for him," said a fellow clerk.

Bono did not heed the remark, but laid his hand once more on the latch.

It raised, and the door, to his joy, was unlocked.

Instantly he passed within, and closing the door quickly behind him, bolted it.

Then he started and stood gazing at an object in one end of the room near the panel door.

What it was that caused the boy to stare so the reader will soon know.

CHAPTER LI.

THE JEWEL VAULT.

WHEN Don Rudolpho returned to his sanctum he found it vacant, but he little dreamed that Bono had glided out of the other door an instant before he came through the panel.

"Well, it is too soon for the boy to return," he said.

"So I will complete the arrangements I have to make for my departure."

"The Lady Rita will go, of course, and she will be my wife within a short time."

"My wife, did I say?"

"I forgot the deformity that was here a short while ago, and who bears that relationship to me."

"But Rita will never know that secret of my life."

"I love her desperately."

"I never had but three loves in my life, among all the beautiful women I have met."

"The first was my wife."

"But I was young then, and a fool."

"Yet, perhaps if we had not been cast upon that island, and she been tattooed beyond recognition, I might have still loved her."

"My life might have been different; but yet I judge I was cut out for a villain."

"Still, it is hard to tell what a man or woman will do until they are tempted."

"Angels might have been devils, and devils angels, under different circumstances."

"My second love—ah! I must get these papers together," and he went on with his work, while he mused aloud:

"My second love was that lovely woman, Madam Bonodel, whose husband I ruined at the gambling-table, and caused him to take his own life."

"That is just what I expected, and worked for, in a man of his high-strung nature; but I did not expect that the wife would spurn me as she did."

"Well, I had my revenge and kept my head out of her mouth."

"Then I had her little girl kidnapped, and what became of her I do not know, nor do I care."

"The mother died of starvation, and they called it a broken heart, while the boy has doubtless gone to the bad long ere this."

"But I was avenged for her spurning me."

"My third love is the fair Rita."

"A smuggler's daughter, a pirate's widow; but what care I for that?"

"She is beautiful beyond compare, and fascinates me; but she has claws beneath her velvet ways, and I must handle her tenderly."

"Why does not that boy come back, I wonder?"

"He certainly would not run off with the money, for it is not in him to do so, or his face belies him."

"Now, Perdido I always doubted, for his face had scamp stamped upon it, and egad! he looks like me, his father."

"Ha! ha! ha! like father, like son, is a very true saying."

"But I must get my things out of the vault."

With this he went to the shop and called out:

"Has Bono returned?"

"No, señor."

"When he comes, tell him to await in the ante-room until I call him."

"Yes, señor."

"If anybody calls, say I am away."

"Yes, señor."

Seeing some articles he needed lying near, he took them in his arms and carried them into his sanctum.

Having his arms full prevented him from locking the door behind him, as was his wont, while for announcing visitors there was a tube in the wall, to which Bono would place his lips, and his words distinctly reach the ears of the Don, who opened the portal with a cord from where he sat, for his mechanical turn of mind had caused him to get about him many conveniences.

This oversight of not locking the door was a bad one on the part of the Don, as will be seen.

Removing a large mat from the floor, the money-lender stood on a certain spot near the wall, and under the table standing near the secret panel, and immediately three of the boards in the flooring began to move beneath his weight.

Almost imperceptibly they moved, though

rapidly, rolling inwardly, yet showing no sign of the mechanism beneath.

Stopping when a dark open space was revealed, he stepped down into it, and disappeared, seemingly descending upon a ladder.

Then a bright light streamed from below, showing that he had the means there to see his treasures.

The place was a vault, hardly six feet square, and in one side of it was an iron door that appeared to be a safe.

Still, upon shelves, around the walls, were the treasures of the money-lender.

Little buckskin bags hung on pegs, and upon each one was marked the contents.

For instance, one bore the name of "Rubies," another of "Diamonds," then "Opals," "Pearls," "Sapphires," "Garnets," "Turquoise," "Emeralds" and "Uncut Gems," followed in the order named, as they hung upon the pegs.

Some of the little bags were full, apparently, others partly so, and of diamonds there were five different pouches.

To a nail hung a large leather vest with various pockets in it.

This the money-lender put on, and then deposited the bags in the different pockets, while he muttered:

"I have a large fortune in this vest alone."

Drawing his clothes on over the precious leather garment, he then proceeded to gather up other treasures in sachels, of which he had three.

These riches consisted of all kinds of jewelry, such as bracelets, necklaces, brooches, ear-drops, buckles, and chains of rare workmanship.

Then there were many watches, and other odds and ends of value.

These were all placed carefully in the sachels, which were then locked.

Having cleared up the articles in sight, the money-lender touched a spring, and the iron door on one side flew open, revealing a cavernous like tunnel-way.

As he stooped to look within, he suddenly uttered a cry and started back, a look of horror upon his face as he looked upward at the trap in the flooring.

What he saw above him filled the heart of the money-lender with horror, for there was a face peering down upon him with a malignant look upon it, as the light of the room and reflection of the lantern below plainly revealed.

But that was not all that startled the money-lender, for he beheld the sliding trap moving toward the wall, as though to shut him within.

It was the youth, Bono, who was kneeling upon it, and his weight was causing it to slide back into place.

As he had entered the sanctum it was the sight of the rug and table out of place and the open trap that had so startled him.

Instantly he had sprung toward the open space and glanced within.

One look showed him that the money-lender was below, packing up his jewels.

He also saw that, if he closed the trap, with its heavy flooring and padding, no sound from below could be heard above in the room.

He trembled like a leaf and became deadly pale.

Then he hissed forth:

"Nobody knows of this secret vault, I am convinced, and here is my chance for revenge most complete."

"But how to close it is the question."

He found that he could not move the boards, or rather slide, back into place.

Then, in changing his position, he felt the boards moving under him.

"Ha! chance has revealed it!" he cried.

Looking down into the vault once more, as the slide rolled under him, he cried:

"Ho! Don Rudolpho! I am the son of Monsieur Bonodel, whom you drove to death, whose child you kidnapped, and whose wife you cruelly killed."

"Ha! ha! ha! you need not attempt to climb up here, for I will hurl you back."

"Your bank notes I have, and will keep, as you stole my inheritance."

"Farewell, Don Rudolpho, the money-lender!"

With the boy's last words the slide got into place, just as the head of the money-lender was thrust hard against it.

But listening, the youth heard only a muf-

fled sound below, and replacing the rug once more, and table, he could not even hear this.

"Now he is dead, and I am avenged; but my poor little sister, what fate has been hers?" and the boy's eyes filled with tears.

Leaving Rudolpho to his fate, the victim of a boy's revenge, Bono seized the sachel of bank-notes, and retreated to the shop, where he calmly resumed his duties, as though nothing had happened of a tragic nature before his eyes, and one seeing him and knowing the circumstances, would have wondered at his remarkable nerve.

CHAPTER LII.

CONCLUSION.

WHEN the tattooed Witch and Perdido returned to their inn, they settled themselves down with what patience they could command, to await the discovery of the money-lender's death, for that he was dead, through the poison she had poured in his glass, the woman did not for a moment doubt, so cunningly had the Don played his part.

She talked over the whole matter of her wealth with her son, who had told her again and again what he knew of the vast riches of his wicked father, and their minds reveled upon the "castles in the air" that they built for themselves, the woman even forgetting her tattooed deformity, in her enthusiasm at what that vast gold would buy.

But they must wait patiently to hear of the mysterious death of Don Rudolpho, the money-lender.

Then they would act, and for their own benefit only.

They had gone to the money-lender's shop in a perfect disguise.

They did not fear to be recognized as they then were, and when it was publicly proclaimed that the Don was dead, they would at once make it known who they were, and thus get possession of his vast wealth.

Such was their plan; but then it went wrong.

They waited, but the money-lender was not found dead.

Then they sought to find out why.

Bono was found in the shop the next day, and coolly said that he had not seen his master for two days.

That he had last seen him in his sanctum with a strange man and a veiled woman.

This was all he knew. Search was made for him, but he could not be found.

Then the mother and son, believing that some of his clerks, fearing that they would be accused of his murder, had hidden the body, came out and laid claim to his property.

They proved their title, without trouble; but when the wealth of the money-lender was searched for, it consisted only of various lots of booty found in the shop.

The huge old mansion was searched, but without other result, and the tattooed woman and her son disappeared suddenly from the scene, going no one knew or cared where, as soon as they had received the money for the goods that were taken from the shop and sold.

As for Bono, he, too, disappeared; but no one cared to live in the old mansion, which had long borne the reputation of being haunted, with its half a hundred tenantless rooms, and it remained deserted.

But the searchers had never once come upon the secret chambers, the prison of the Smuggler Queen, and only long years after, in tearing down the old mansion, did the workmen come across the moldering bones of human beings in what had evidently been hidden rooms, while in a vault in the cellar a skeleton form was found that was said to be the money-lender's, who, going into it, had by accident been caught there and died, sharing the same death that those had met in the wing above, and a fate that all who knew of his crimes would agree was a just one.

With their foes thus removed from their way, only happiness fell upon the inmates of Brandt Plantation, while Irving, after making a name for himself that will long live in story, married the beautiful Myrtle, daughter of a pirate though she was, and settled down to the life of a planter, while the Sea Fox, unable to give up his life on the ocean, continued until his death in command of a coast-guard cruiser.

THE END.

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